

MERCHANT GUILDS IN MEDIEVAL SOUTH INDIA—A STUDY

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I, **M.A. ILAHI BAKSH** hereby declare that the thesis for Ph.D degree entitled **MERCHANT GUILDS IN MEDIEVAL SOUTH INDIA – A STUDY** is a record of original and independent research work done by me under the supervision and guidance of **Dr. Major Syed Shahabuddeen, Principal, Islamiah College, Vaniyambadi** and it has not formed the basis for the award of any Degree, Diploma, Associateship, Fellowship or other similar title to any candidate in any University.

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M.A. ILAHI BAKSH

GLOSSARY

Ainnurruvar	--	five hundred men
Anjuvannam	--	five colours
Arunurruvar	--	six hundred men
Ayirathu	--	thousand
Baihulmal	--	Trust for the poor
Chekku	--	grinder
Chinnaknnagam	--	gold coin
Ezhu	--	seven
Gramam	--	village
Idangai	--	left hand
Kaikolar	--	weaver
Kal	--	stone
Kalaiyar	--	youth
Kasturi	--	musk
Kasu	--	coin
Kodudthome	--	given
Labbai	--	a Muslim community
Lungi	--	a dress below the waist
Magimai	--	cess
Mandapam	--	dome
Nadukal	--	erected stone
Nagarathar	--	city people
Nanadesi	--	many countries
Odam	--	boat
Pachai	--	raw

Padinettu	--	eighteen
Pana	--	Rupee
Pari	--	a small round boat
Pattinam	--	town
Perumpathan	--	gold smith
Sayam	--	colour
Sonahar	--	progeny of Arabs
Thisai	--	direction
Ulg	--	customs duty
Ur	--	village
Valangai	--	right hand
Vamsam	--	generation
Venda	--	cooked
Yavanar	--	Arabs, Greeks or Romans

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CHAPTER - I

INTRODUCTION

A guild is an association of people of same trade and pursuits with a similar skill or craft. It was formed to protect mutual interest and maintain standards of morality or conduct. Historically guilds were formed to benefit societies or small business associations. They were also referred to as a trade union of sorts, since each crafter was a self-employed individual artisan or part of small craft shop.

They grew out of natural conditions in response to social necessity. They had come into existence among the Greeks and Romans centuries before, the former calling them "*thiassoi*" and the latter, "*collegia*". It is generally related that there had been some historical continuity between the guilds of early England and the Roman *collegia*.

It is reported that the first guilds were organised in Italy. Commercial and craft guilds began to become common in France, the Netherlands, Norway, Denmark and Sweden in the eleventh century.

The guild principle proved so successful and was applied to so many uses that by the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, it became the outstanding feature of the social and economic life of Europe.

These were voluntary associations of men organised for mutual defence and to police the community in a period when national governments were not known and when the authority of the town was very weak.

In the course of time guilds multiplied until they came to be used for every conceivable purpose, for good-fellowship, for drinking, for insuring a decent burial, for worship, for hunting, travel, art and for banking. There were guilds for men, women, children, for rich and for poor, in the country and in the town. Functions now performed by government, armies, schools, stores, factories, hospitals, trade unions, and most of the other innumerable forms were then held by guilds.

When Henry VIII despoiled all religious guilds, it died down rapidly with the advent of the capitalist system, and came to a dead stop in the last century. France prohibited them in 1789-91; Spain and

Portugal in 1833-40; Austria and Germany in 1859-60; Italy in 1864; Scotland in 1846, and England in 1835.

The merchant **guilds** were formed in all the towns for the purpose of managing and controlling trade and commerce. Such a guild included all engaged in a given kind of commerce, wage-earners and proprietors. The object was to enable the merchants to maintain a monopoly of all the commodities in a given community. They reached their zenith in the twelfth century, began to disappear in the fourteenth century and were almost completely superseded by craft guilds in the fifteenth century.

Merchant **guilds** engaged in many activities. Among the most important of their functions was the control of import and export of wares, the regulation of wages and prices, and the inspection and standardization of goods. Every member had to pay the general taxes and take oath to obey the rulers and ordinances, as well as contribute his annual dues. As a reward for his membership he was privileged to share in business transactions and in bargains, and was given a status in the community very much coveted. The guild was governed by an elder man and his associates. It had its own treasury, passed its own ordinances. It

could fine or otherwise punish its members, and in some instances had its own court. At periodical meetings the brethren passed or revised ordinances, admitted new members, feasted and elected officers.

A guild member was to see that he was properly dressed with rich cloths and its candles always burning. One guild perpetuated its memory by founding the famous college, **Cambridge**. It still bears its name. In this way the guilds contributed to the spread of learning, and the voluntary efforts of artisans helped to keep burning the lamp of knowledge.

The guild often had its own court and members were admitted on oath. Women were admitted into many guilds and were permitted to take apprentices. The most admirable feature in the whole **guild** system was the institution called apprenticeship, which was a method for training youths in their vocation. A boy was contracted to some master for a term of years, which in earlier times might last from one to ten years, but in 1563 was fixed at seven years everywhere in England. The master provided food, shelter and technical training, and generally stood to the boy in *loco parentis*. The beginnings of this system have been traced to

A.D 1260. It became a vital part of the whole economic system in the thirteenth century. Apprentices were usually registered with the town authorities and otherwise given a recognized status in the community.

With the coming of modern capitalism and manufacturing and the whole guild system broke up and quietly passed away. Some of the craft societies still survived as late as the latter half of the eighteenth century, but their privileges were formally and finally abolished by parliament in 1835.

The origin and development of modern guild system has a long history. To begin with, Islamic civilization extended this guild system to a degree to the artisan as well, most notably to the **warraqueen**, "those who work with paper". Early Muslims were heavily engaged in translating and absorbing all *ilm* (knowledge) from all other known civilizations, as far as China. Critically analyzing, accepting, rejecting, improving and codifying knowledge from other cultures became a key activity, and a knowledge industry as presently understood began to evolve. By the beginning of the 9th century, paper had become the standard medium of written communication. Most **warraqueen** were

engaged in paper-making, book-selling, and taking the dictation of authors, to whom they were obliged to pay royalties on works, and who had final discretion on the contents. As the standard means of presentation of a new work was its public dictation in the Mosque or Madrassah, in front of many scholars and students, a high degree of professional respect was required to ensure that other **warraqueen** did not simply make and sell copies, or that authors did not lose faith in the **warraqueen** or this system of publication. This publication industry that spanned the Muslim empire from the first works under this system in 874 to the 15th century, gave rise to all concerns a modern intellectual property lawyer would recognize. This was an early guild.

By about 1100 A.D European guilds (or gilds) had evolved into an approximate equivalent to modern-day business organisations such as institutes or consortiums. The guild was at the centre of European handicraft organisation. The guild system reached a mature state in Germany in the middle Ages. The guilds were identified with organisations enjoying certain privileges, usually issued by the king or state and overseen by local town business authorities or some kind of

chamber of commerce. These were the predecessors of the modern patent and trademark system.

In many German towns, the more powerful guilds attempted to influence or even control town authorities. Despite its advantages for agricultural and artisan producers, the guild became a target of much criticism towards the end of the eighteenth century and the beginning of the nineteenth century. They were opposed to free trade and hinder technological innovation, technology transfer and business development. Guilds became increasingly involved in simple territorial struggles against each other.

After the French Revolution, the influence and power of the guilds began to decline in many European countries. The guild system was disbanded and replaced by free trade laws. By that time, many former handicraft workers had been forced to seek employment in the emerging manufacturing industries. Due to their own inability to control unruly corporate behaviour, the tide turned against the guilds.

Two of the most outspoken critics of the guild system were Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Adam Smith. There was a tendency all over

Europe to oppose government control over trades in favour of *laissez-faire*. Free market systems was growing rapidly and making its way into the political and legal system. Even Karl Marx not normally in league with Adam Smith in his Communist Manifesto criticised the guild system for its rigid gradation of social rank and the relation of oppressor with oppressed entailed by this system.

Guilds are sometimes said to be the precursors of modern trade unions. However, Guilds were groups of self-employed skilled craftsmen with ownership and control over the materials. Guilds were small business associations and thus had very little in common with trade unions. Modern guilds exist in different forms around the world. In many European countries guilds had a revival as local organisations for craftsmen, primarily in traditional skills. They function as forum for developing competence. They are often the local units of a national employer's organisation. They organise group activities, regulate member behaviour, exclude non-conforming individuals, and react as a group when member safety or some aspect of guild life is threatened.¹

¹ Wikipedia, **The free encyclopedia**, Online publication.

In India the evolution of Merchant Guilds as associations of groups of people involved in trading activities had taken place during the ancient period. Merchant Guilds provided the institutional frame-work for organised commerce internally and overseas. To begin with, guilds known as **Srenis** in Sanskrit in Ancient India refer to a group of merchants. It was termed as Guilds by the Europeans. There was no common name in earlier times to denote trader's organisation. It is observed that such merchant corporations which existed from the Mauryan period had later developed as very important commercial institutions during the medieval period of South India. They were not only guilds of merchants in the ancient period but also guilds of artisans, agriculturists, different castes and even warriors. The people of the same caste were able to function as a group. When they tried to dip their toes into commercial activities, the assembly of certain groups evolved into merchant guilds.

A detailed and a scientific study on the history and activities of the merchant guilds of medieval South India has not so far been taken up by scholars. So there is an imperative need to take up the study.

The main hypothesis of the study is to probe into the organisational and functional aspects of five important merchant guilds of South India namely **Anjuvannam**, **Manigramam**, **Thisai Ayirathu Ainurruvar**, **Nanadesi** and **Ayyavole** with their historical background. The pertinent question in the study is whether **Anjuvannam** a notable merchant guild of this period is identified as an exclusive group of Muslim traders or a non-Muslim one. The study investigates into the actual religious identity of this guild. Another question is whether **Anjuvannam** had its branches in foreign countries and expanded its overseas trade or confined its commercial activities to inland trade only. This aspect is also probed in detail in this study. **Manigramam**, another major group of merchants are found to occur along with **Anjuvannam** in the copper plate inscriptions of Sthanu Ravi. They dominated the internal and external trade of South India and South Eastern countries. They have left their cultural influence in the customs and the language of Malaya and Indonesia. **Thisai Ayirathu Ainnurruvar** and **Nanadesi** are identified as one merchant group. The study delves deep into this aspect to find out whether both of them were independent and separate organisations or one combined

guild. The study is of significance as it covers an in-depth scrutiny of **Anjuvannam** guild of merchants. The study touches a hitherto unexplored field pertaining to the Muslim identity of **Anjuvannam**.

The period of study is from the ninth century to the end of fourteenth century. During this period, the imperial Cholas and the second Pandyas ruled over the Tamil country. The greatest and the most popular of the Chola rulers were Rajaraja, Rajendra I and Kulottunga I. The Chola power began to decline from the thirteenth century onwards. Their place was taken over by the later Pandyas who had commercial contacts with West Asia, South East Asia and China. Both Cholas and Pandyas were entangled in Sri Lankan Politics and economy. The important ruling dynasties in Kannada areas were Rashtrakutas, the Western Chalukyas of Kalyan and the Hoysalas. Yadavas and Kakatiyas also emerged as powers to reckon with during the period.

The study is based on literary and epigraphical sources. The published works which give clues to the better understanding of the subject are consulted. *Asoka and the Decline of the Mauryas* by

Romila Thapar², *History of Ancient India* by Rama Shankar Tripathi,³ *Economic Life in Ancient India* by Magan Lal Buch,⁴ *An Advanced History of India* Part-I by R.C. Majumdar,⁵ and *Ancient India and Indian Civilization* by Paul Masson-Oursel, Helena De Willman-Grabowska, Philippe Stern⁶ are some of the published works available to understand the backdrop of the study.

K.A.Nilakanta Sastri, Burton Stein and Noboru Karashima are the three illustrious personalities who have acquired and established mastery and scholarship on the history of South India. K.A.N.Sastry stressed that the importance of maritime trade led to its detailed investigation. Noboru Karashima's conclusions on the existence of bureaucracy during Chola

² Romila Thapar, *Asoka and the Decline of the Mauryas*, Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1993

³ Rama Shankar Tripathi, *History of Ancient India*, 1967.

⁴ Maganlal A. Buch, *Economic Life in Ancient India*, 1979

⁵ Majumdar, R.C., *Ancient Indian Colonies in the Far East*, vol. 2, *Suvarnadvipa*, Calcutta, 1937,

⁶ Paul Masson-Oursel, Helena De Willman-Grabowska, and Philippe Stern, *Ancient India and Indian Civilization*, 1967

period can't be refuted. Burton Stein's researches are supportive to understand the economic and commercial activity of the medieval South India. Apart from this notable trio, many other scholars have attempted on different aspects of guilds but in a very limited way.

K.R. Venkatarama Ayyar has worked on '*Medieval Trade, Craft and Merchant Guilds in South India*'.⁷ Similarly G.S.Dikshit has studied on 'Constitution of Trade Guilds in Medieval Karnataka. K.Indrapala has brought out two essays on 'Some Medieval Communities of South India and Ceylon' and 'South Indian Mercantile Communities in Ceylon'. These works of scholars deal any one of the aspects of the study. However it forms the basis for the present study.

*Two Medieval Merchant Guilds of South India*⁸ written by Meera Abraham is a *magnum opus* on merchant groups. According to Meera

⁷ Venkatarama Ayyar, K.R. "Medieval Trade, Craft and Merchant Guilds in South India", Journal of Indian History 25, 3, 1947, 269-80.

⁸ Meera Abraham, *Two Medieval Guilds of South India*, New Delhi, 1988.

Abraham the **Ayyavole** merchants claim their origin from a place called Aihole in the western Deccan. The phrase *500 Svamis* occurs in the **Ayyavole** merchant guild inscriptions. The same numerical figure keeps its appearance as a prefix to *Mahajans* too. Aihole was an *agrahara* consisting of *500 Mahajans* who were also known as *500 Svamis*. It is clear from the inscriptions that *ainnuru Svamis* (Five hundred Svamis) and *Ainnuru Mahajans* were members of the *Ayyavole* guild of merchants, suggesting continued Brahmin participation in the guild.

There was a colony of merchants called **Thisai Ayirathu Ainnurrvar**. They had a chief town called *Aruviyur*. This group of merchants had its name some times inscribed as ***Thisai Ayirathu Ainnurruva Nanadesi***. So it seems that it is one of the branches of ***Ainnurruvar*** in the Tamil country. **Ainnurruvar** were the most celebrated merchant groups in medieval South India according to K.A. Neelakanta Sastri. Meera Abraham equated the *500 Svami (Ainnuru Svami)* of Kannada to **Ainnurruvar** of Cola country. "*Aimpolir Paramesvarikkum Bhumidevikkum Makkalagi...*" is a phrase in Tamil in the great Piranmali inscription of Pudukkottai. *Aimpolir Paramesvari* is

translated by Meera Abraham as the children of *Paramesvari of Ayyavole*. *Ayyapolil Nachiyar* mentioned in Pudukkottai inscriptions of twelfth century is also identified by Meera Abraham as *Paramesvari of Ayyavole*. The Tamil and Kannada inscriptions used different terminology to describe *Ainnurruvar* and *Ainnuru Svami*, apart from the similarity in the numerical prefix. So it is very difficult to arrive at a conclusion that Kannada *Ainnuru svami* and Tamil *Ainnurruvar* refer to the same guild of merchants. But it is noted that Meera Abraham did not venture to make an in depth study of the most important merchant guilds of medieval South India namely *Anjuvannam*, *Nanadesi* and *Ainnurruvar*. Hence her study is neither complete nor comprehensive.

The king consolidated his hold through the traders. “*Kongudesa Rajakkal*” a chronicle written in 17th century endorses the same ideal.⁹ In the opinion of Meera Abraham the description in the chronicle is interesting for the obvious assumption that the Brahman and the trader are part of the necessary establishment and that after the conquest of a

⁹ W.Taylor, Trans., “*Conga desa Rajakal*” in MJLS, 14 (1847), 17.

town the traders are required to provide the capital necessary for settling the Brahmin in his *agrahara*. The provision of *agraharas* as one of the first acts of monarch after the capture of a city is frequently referred to elsewhere in the *Kongadesa Rajakkal*.

Perungathai, a seventh century Tamil literature written by Kongu Velir refers to the presence of *Yavanar* in the Tamil country. The word *yavanar* stands to identify the progeny of Arabs during the seventh century and after. It provides information related to this study to a greater extent.

Palsanthamalai, an eighth century Eulogy in Tamil on a Caliph from *Vahudhapuri* (Kayalpattinam) in *Vachira Nadu* refers vividly to *Yavanar* and *Anjuvannam*. This poem indicates that the *yavanar* prayed to Allah. By making references to *Anjuvannam* and their prayer to Allah, Palsanthamalai gives a clear idea of the Muslim identity of the *Anjuvannam* merchant guild. It portrays the organisational and structural frame work of the Muslim merchant guild.

Meharaj Malai is a sixteenth century poem. To add merit to this analysis, the poet Ali Pulavar in his **Meharaj Malai** refers to this group of merchants as *Anjuvanna Muslimavargal*. This literary source is helpful to establish the religious identity of Anjuvannam.

A Tamil poem from a collection of Old Songs found in Saraswati Mahal Library at Thanjavur is quoted by T.V. Sadasiva Pandarathar in his book **Kalvettukkal Koorum Unmaigal**.¹⁰ The Tamil verses are analysed to give credit to the Muslim identity of *Anjuvannam* in *Nagai* area (Nagore and Nagappattinam).

The Prasasti which is found often at the beginning of the inscriptions speaks about the eulogy of the ruler or merchant guild. Sadasiva Pandarathar has studied these inscriptions in Tamil and published a book entitled **Kalvettukkal Koorum Unmaigal**.

¹⁰ Sadasiva Pandarathar, T.V., *Kalvettukkal Koorum Unmaigal* (Tamil), Manivasagar Pathippagam, Chennai, 2003.

His commentary and explanation are very useful and helpful to understand the contents and meaning of the epigraphical sources in its proper historical perspective.

The information required for reconstructions of the history and organisation of merchant guilds of medieval India is scattered and varied. It is to be gleaned from several sources. Epigraphical sources form the basis of the study. The inscriptions which are relevant to the study are mostly in Tamil or Kannada and a few in Malayalam. They are generally recorded on stone and occasionally on copper plates. The inscriptions on stone are mostly available in and around temples and they deal with the collection of taxes in cash or in kinds, public services in villages or in urban areas, contracts between rulers and merchant guilds, granting of trade rights to a group of foreign traders and also grants of privileges and immunities to alien trading groups. In the published inscriptions, it is observed that some portions are omitted and some of them are abbreviated. So on several occasions, it becomes necessary to refer the original in the office of the Archaeological Survey of India.

Ninth and tenth century copper plate inscriptions of Tarissappalli, Cochin and Kottayam refer explicitly to the merchant guilds of *Anjuvannam* and *Manigramam*. The year 849 A.D. was *annus mirabilis* for the Arab trading voyages to the west coast in South India. The presence of Muslim traders from Arabia in the different parts of Kerala is proved by the Tarissappalli copper plate inscription of ninth century. A group of eleven Arab Muslims attested a grant in Arabic using Kufic characters as witnesses. The signatures appended to the grant include Zorastrians, Muslims and also possibly Jews and Christians.

The original texts of the Sthanu Ravi copper plates in Tamil including the *Theerthandathanapuram* stone inscription are given by T.V. Sadasiva Pandarathar in his book titled *Kalvettukkal Koorum Unmaigal* (Truth spoken by the Inscriptions). The phrases in these inscriptions are examined threadbare for writing the thesis.

The source materials for writing the thesis are both primary and secondary. The primary sources include the Annual Reports on South India n Epigraphy (ARE), South India n Inscriptions (SII), Travancore

Archaeological Series (TAS), Inscriptions of Pudukkottai State (PSI), Journal of Tamil Studies (JTS), Journal of Malaysian Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society (JMRAS), Journal of Indian History (JIH), Quarterly Journal of Mythic Society (QJMS) and Journal of Medieval History (JMH). The theme is well supported by the works of eminent historians which constitute the secondary source.

This thesis is divided into seven chapters including the introduction and the conclusion. In the introduction, an explanation about the merchant guilds, necessity for its formation, rules and regulations of merchant guilds etcetera are explained as a backdrop of the study. The hypothesis of the thesis, time-frame and review of literature are presented. Both the primary and secondary sources consulted for writing this descriptive study are evaluated. The plan of study and chapterisation is given.

Merchant Guilds in Ancient India - A Historical perspective

forms the second chapter. It deals with the groups of castes and crafts and their growth leading to the formation of guilds in Ancient India. In the

first century B.C., persons following the same profession normally organised themselves into guilds and often lived in groups around their business centres. They were mostly known as **Srenis** in the Satavahana period. They acted also as Banks. Money could be deposited in those guilds and that money carried interest. The guilds were considered to be more permanent than an empire which could be destroyed at anytime.

The third chapter is about **Anjuvannam** merchants. Their religious affiliations were found to be with Islam according to collateral evidences recorded in Tamil literary works like *Perungathai*, *Palsanthamalai*, and *Meharaj Malai*. In Kottayam, Quilon and Cochin copper plate inscriptions Anjuvannam along with Manigramam repeatedly appeared. Anjuvannam, Manigramam and other groups of merchants met to discuss the levy of cess on articles of trade. The guild of Anjuvannam had its representatives in the administrative wings of the Temple according to some epigraphic evidences. It was an epitome of religious harmony.

The fourth chapter entitled **Manigramam** deals with the growth of the 9th century guild of merchants. It describes the mercantile adventure

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The fourth chapter entitled **Manigramam** deals with the growth of the 9th century guild of merchants. It describes the mercantile adventure

of Manigramam to **Takuapa** at Siam. Manigramam appeared along with Anjuvannam in the copper plates of Sthanu Ravi period. It is learnt from the frequency of their concurrent occurrences in the inscriptions that they were birds of same feathers and they often flocked together.

The fifth chapter captioned **Ainnurruvar** gives a detailed account of the itinerant traders spread over different directions in various countries. The scholars have their own doubts about a separate entity for *Nanadesi* as a guild of merchants. The appearance of *Nanadesi* as a suffix to *Thisai AyirathuAinnurruvar* in the inscriptions displayed ample evidence to believe that *Nanadesi* and *Ainnurruvar* are one and the same. *Thisai Ayirathu Ainnurruva Nanadesi*, the phrase in Tamil was translated by K.A. Neelakanta Sastri as ‘Five Hundred of the Thousand directions in all countries.’ Hence it is deduced that *Ainnurruvar* and the *Nanadesi* are the two sides of the same coin.

The sixth chapter covers **Ayyavole** merchant guild and its contact with other guilds of merchants. Ayyavole traces their origin to Aihole near Southern Hyderabad in the western Deccan. It began to form itself

into a guild of merchants in the eighth or ninth century. It was a Brahmin dominated group of merchants. Aihole was an agraharam consisting of **500 Svamis** who were also known as **500 Mahajans**. It had spread over a limited area in the Deccan according to G.S. Dikshit who has analysed the working of the Kannada Ayyavole association. Ayyavole merchants had their trading activities extended unto Pudukkottai district and associated themselves with **Ainnurruvar** according to Meera Abraham. The Scholar claims that Ayyavole of Kannada inscriptions and Ainnurruvar of Chola country refer to the same set of guild of merchants. The claim of Meera, the author of *Two Medieval Merchant Guilds of South India*, regarding the *Ainnurruvar* is debatable. The study investigates into all these issues.

Many years of unrelenting conflicts between kings were not merely the greed for power but also for the wealth of the enemy. To scrape away the market restrictions, expeditions were undertaken by the kings. The business ventures of the various merchant groups and their social obligations along with their latent political power are studied in detail supported by inscriptional evidences. This may help to provide

tentative answers as to why this area became the subject matter of this dissertation. In the conclusion, the findings of the study are given.

CHAPTER - II

MERCHANT GUILDS IN ANCIENT INDIA

-A HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

Corporate life existed in Ancient India ever since the Vedic period. The word *Gana* meant community and the head of the community or group or corporate body was called *Ganapathi*. This name was later identified with Elephant God or deity of learning also known as Ganesha. The existence of corporate bodies is traced back to 800-1000 B.C. Caravans of merchants known as *Sarthas* or *Sarthavahanas* toured the entire Indian sub-continent. They do find mention in good numbers in early centuries.

During the Vedic period, Guilds were known as *Srenis* or *Nigamas*. They were elected mercantile bodies who controlled trade and commerce of various commodities. These were great supporters of Royal power, who arranged wrestling

matches and athletic games. Harivamsa refers to a wrestling match between Krishna and Kamsa for which an arena was constructed with pavilions of different guilds and banners each bearing an emblem signifying their craft.¹

Ancient Indian guilds are a unique and multifaceted form of organizations which combine the functions of democratic governments, a trade union, a court of justice and a technological Institution. The guilds provided a congenial atmosphere for work. They procured raw materials for manufacturing, controlled quality of manufactured goods and located markets for their sale.²

Various terms were used to denote economic corporations. The most important word is perhaps *Sreni*. Medhatithi defines it as guilds of merchants, artisans, bankers, and Brahmins learned in the four Vedas. Kautilya uses the word to indicate guilds of workmen, a military class and

¹ Jyotsna Kamat, **Guilds in Ancient India**, Online publication, October 01, 2004.

² Manikant Shah and D.P. Agarwal, **Sreni (Guilds): a Unique Social Innovation of Ancient India**, Online Publication.

corporations that subsist by trade, agriculture, milking etc. In Mahabharata *Sreni* means a guild of merchants. Panini defines it as an assembly of persons following a common craft or trade in a commodity. Thus it is taken to be the fundamental characteristic of *Sreni*. It is a corporation of people following the same trade or craft. In other words it means a guild of artisans or traders.³

The origin, formation and functions of guilds are referred by Kautilya in his *Arthashastra* during the 4th century B.C. Kautilya showed the extent to which the economics contributed to politics and advised princess to have superintendents who controlled mines, weaving, irrigation, stock-raising and trade. The trade, the source of wealth was developing significantly under the influence of monarchy.⁴

In an ideal scheme of a city, sites were reserved for offices and quarters of guilds men. Taxes paid by the guilds

³ Maganlal A. Buch, **Economic Life in Ancient India**, 1979, p.362

⁴ Paul Masson-Oursel, Helena De Willman-Grabowska, Philippe Stern, **Ancient India and Indian Civilization**, 1967, p.115

formed an important source of income to the state. Guilds of a co-operative nature were referred to as *Samutthachara*. Various undertakings of the guilds helped amass huge fortunes and Kautilya prescribes methods of extracting money from these guilds in times of need by the state.

One of the several functions of the guilds was the relief of the poor, the constructions of buildings and maintenance of Temples. The guilds were a power to reckon with because they were a big tax-paying institution.⁵

Kautilya is of the opinion that these organizations would occasionally be a menace to the authority of the central government. Kautilya says that the land with scattered people is better than the land of merchants as the people can be kept under control and they are not susceptible to the intrigues of enemies while a group of merchants is intolerant of calamities and vulnerable to anger and other passions.⁶

⁵ Kautilya, *Artha Sastra*, II. 6.

⁶ -----Ibid. VII,11

The autocratic or unpopular or weak administrations would find in these organizations occasional centres of rebellion. It was advisable to take special means to divide and weaken them. The chiefs of guilds were to be paid the same amount as the chiefs of elephants to enlist their support actively on the side of government.⁷

It deserves mention here that the King as well as independent cities in Ancient India depended to a large extent on the tribute paid by the peasantry, but a considerable portion of the state revenues came from traders. In records of the Mauryan period *sulka* is mentioned as an important source of royal income along with '*bali*' and '*bhaga*'. India under Mauryan kings had direct relations with Syria, Egypt and other countries of the Hellenistic West.

There was a considerable body of foreign residents in the metropolis whose affairs were looked after by a special board of municipal commissioner. These foreigners could not all have been diplomatists. Some of them were in all probability traders. As early as the first century B.C. contact

⁷ .-----Ibid, V, 3

was established between India and the Roman Empire. A constant intercourse with China, the Hellenic world, Ceylon and India existed in the early centuries of the Christian era, according to epigraphic as well as literary references. These are recorded in the Nagarjunikonda inscriptions and the Milindapanho.

Sweet wine and dried figs of the West were eagerly sought by a Maurya king in the third century B.C. In the first century A.D. presents for the king of Broach, which was one of the greatest marts in the east, included costly vessels of silver, singing boys, beautiful maidens for the harem, fine wines, thin clothing and the choicest ointments. The Westerners on their part imported articles of luxury including the fine muslin of the lower Gangetic region. Pliny, the Roman historian bears testimony to the vast sums of money sent to India in payment for these commodities. As early as the fourth century B.C. the municipal authorities of Pataliputra had to constitute a special board to superintend trade and commerce. Its members had charge of weights and

measures and saw that products in their seasons were sold with an official stamp. In the first century A.D. trade between India and the West was greatly facilitated when the pilot Hippalus discovered how to lay his course straight across the ocean. The splendid river system of northern India rendered transport comparatively easy in this area. The Maurya government built ships and let them out on hire for the transport of merchandise. Communication was more difficult in the Deccan, where vast tracts were without roads. The goods had to be carried with difficulty by wagons from Paithan and Tagara to the port of Broach, the modern equivalent of Bombay.⁸

The ancient sources frequently refer to the existence of the system of guilds which originated in the early Buddhist period and continued through the Mauryan period. Topography aided their development. Particular areas of a city were generally inhabited by all tradesmen of a certain

⁸ Majumdar. R.C., *An advanced History of India*, part I, 1970, p.129

craft. One particular craft was centred in a village largely due to the easy availability of raw material.⁹

The three chief requisites necessary for the rise of a guild system were in existence. Firstly, the localization of occupation was possible. Secondly the hereditary character of professions was recognized. Lastly the idea of a guild leader or *jetthaka* was a widely accepted one. The extension of trade in the Mauryan period must have helped considerably in developing and stabilizing the guilds. At first there was an intermediate step between a tribe and a caste. In later years they were dominated by strict rules, which resulted in some of them gradually becoming castes. Another early incentive to forming guilds must have been competition. Economically it was better to work in a body than to work individually. A corporation would provide added social status, and when necessary, assistance could be sought from other members. By gradual stages guilds developed into the most important industrial bodies in their areas.¹⁰

⁹ Romila Thapar, **Asoka and the Decline of the Mauryas**, 1993,p.73

¹⁰ Ibid ,p.73

The guilds controlled almost the entire manufactured output. They found that they had to meet greater demands than they could cater for. They had to employ hired labour whenever required, in addition to their own labour and that of their families. This consisted of two categories, the *karmakaras* and the *bhatakas* who were regarded as free labourers working for a regular wage, and the *dasas* who were slaves.¹¹

Asoka refers to both categories in his edicts when he speaks of the *bhatakas* and the *dasas*. Thus by the Mauryan period the guilds had developed into fairly large-scale organizations, recognized at least in the northern half of the sub-continent if not throughout the country. It deserves mention here that they were registered by local officials and had a recognized status, as there was a prohibition against any guilds other than the local co-operative ones entering the villages. It

¹¹ Ibid,p.73

clearly establishes that a guild could not move from one area to another without official permission.¹²

Romila Thapar explains that the distribution of work was not only organized in terms of the professions living in the town but also in terms of the physical occupation by different professions. Each *sreni* had its own professional code, working arrangements, duties and obligations and even religious observances. Matters relating to wider areas of dispute were sometimes settled by *srenis* among themselves. Social mobility among such groups would be more frequent. The economic opportunities for improving actual status would be more easily available, particularly during the expansion of trade.¹³

According to **Katyayana**, one committing a heinous crime, or causing a split, or destroying the property of the groups, is to be proclaimed before the King and destroyed.

¹² Ibid

¹³ Manikant Shah and D.P. Agarwal, **Sreni (Guilds): a Unique Social Innovation of Ancient India**, Online Publication.

On the other hand, according to **Brihaspati**, all members of a group have an equal share in whatever is acquired through the King's favour and whatever debts are incurred by them.

The evidence of the late *Smṛiti* law of guilds is corroborated in part by a certain type of clay-seals, which, have been recovered from the excavations of Gupta sites at Basarh (ancient Vaisali) and Bhita (near Allahabad). These seals bear the legend *nigama* in Gupta characters and more particularly the legends *sreni-kulikanigama* and *sreni-sarthavaha-kulika-nigama* (Basarh). These names are often joined with those of private individuals. Here a probable reference to the conventions is made by local industrial and trading groups with private individuals or individual members. Such documents would be called *sthitipatras* or *samvitpatras* in the technical sense of the late *Smṛitis*.¹⁴

¹⁴ Ibid

Kiran Kumar Thaplyal has come out with a very critical and comprehensive study of guilds (*srenis*) in ancient India. Thaplyal shows that both Merchant Guilds as well the Craft Guilds were very much present and played a vital role in the socio-economic structure of ancient India. His database is literary evidence as found in the scriptures, texts and also archaeological findings. He discusses the institution of the Guilds in four time brackets: 1) The Vedic period, 2) Buddhist/Jain period, 3) Mauryan period and 4) and the Post-Mauryan period. Thaplyal sketches a brief historical review and discusses various aspects of the laws, apprenticeship, structure, offices, accounts and the functions of these guilds. He also shows the relationship of the guild to the state. Reference is made to the cobblers' guild, the oil millers' guild, potters guild, weavers' guild, and hydraulic engineers' guild.¹⁵

Thaplyal writes that Buddhism and Jainism, which emerged in the 6th century BC, were more egalitarian than

¹⁵ Ibid

Brahmanism which preceded them and provided a better environment for the growth of guilds. Material wealth and animals were sacrificed in the Brahmanical *yajnas*. The Buddhists and Jains did not perform such *yajnas*. Thus, material wealth and animals were saved and made available for trade and commerce. Since the Buddhists and Jains disregarded the social taboos of purity or pollution in mixing and taking food with people of lower *varnas*, they felt less constrained in conducting long distance trade.¹⁶

The **Gautama Dharmasutra** of 5th century BC states that cultivators, traders, herdsmen, moneylenders, and artisans have authority to lay down rules for their respective classes and the king was to consult their representatives while dealing with matters relating to them.

The *Jataka* tales of Bhuddhuist era refer to eighteen guilds, to their heads, to localization of industry and to the hereditary nature of professions. The *Jataka* stories frequently refer to a son following the craft of his father. Often, *kula* and

¹⁶ Ibid

putta occur as suffixes to craft-names, the former indicating that the whole family adopted a particular craft and the latter that the son followed the craft of his father. This ensured regular trained manpower and created more specialization. Here it is pointed out that the hereditary nature of profession in Indian guilds makes them different from the European guilds of the Middle Ages.

Craft and Trade in Ancient India:

A thriving system of international trade linked the ports of Southern India with those of Ancient Rome. The chronicles of the Greek **Periplus** reveal that Indian exports included a variety of spices, aromatics, quality textiles (muslins and cottons), ivory, high quality iron and gems. Items of luxury in those days were in high demand. A good portion of Indo-Roman trade was reciprocal. Rome was supplying exotic items such as cut-gems, coral, wine, perfumes, papyrus, copper, tin and lead ingots. The trade balance was considerably weighted in India's favour. The balance of payments had to be met in precious metals, either

gold or silver coinage, or other valuables like red coral, the hard currency of the ancient world.

India was particularly renowned for its ivory work and its fine muslins known in Roman literature as 'woven air'. However, these items must have been quite expensive since the Roman writer **Pliny** (AD 23-79) complained of the cost of these and other luxury commodities that were imported from India. The trade surplus gave rise to prosperous urban centres that were linked to an extensive network of internal trade. Literary records from that period paint a picture of abundance and splendour.

The **Silappathikaarum** (The Ankle Bracelet),¹⁷ a Tamil romance roughly dated to the late second century AD, provides a glimpse of the maritime wealth of the cosmopolitan cities of South India. Set in the prosperous port city of *Puhar* (*Kaveripattanam*), the story refers to ship owners having riches, 'the envy of foreign kings'. *Puhar* is portrayed as a city populated by entrepreneurial merchants

¹⁷ **Silappathikaram** is a second century Tamil epic written by **Ilangovalikal**.

and traders, where trade was well regulated. "The city of *Puhar* possessed a spacious forum for storing bales of merchandise, with markings showing the quantity, weight, and name of the owner." The *Silappathikaarum* suggests that the markets offered a great variety of precious commodities prized in the ancient world. Special streets were earmarked for merchants that traded in items such as coral, sandalwood, jewellery, faultless pearls, pure gold, and precious gems. Skilled craftspeople brought their finished goods such as fine silks, woven fabrics, and luxurious ivory carvings. Archaeological finds of spectacular burial jewellery in southern India appear to corroborate such accounts.

Srenis under Satavahanas:

It is interesting to note that Megasthenes, the Seleucid Ambassador divides Indian society into seven classes or castes. The first class was that of the philosophers, and although numerically small, they were the most honoured. This class denoted the Brahmans and ascetics in general. The second class was composed of cultivators, who constituted the

bulk of the population. The third class comprised hunters and herdsmen. The fourth class included **traders, artisans, and boatmen**. The fifth was that of the warriors, representing the *Ksatriyas*. The sixth and seventh classes consisted of secret service men and councilors respectively.¹⁸

The various castes can not be regarded as guilds though they lived in groups. Anyhow the guilds may be considered to be the offshoot of the caste groups. Hence the corporate groups are assumed to be the progeny of the caste groups.

The cultivators and mercantile people were divided into a number of *Grihas* (Homesteads) or Kutumbas or Kulas (families). The head of each of them was called a *Grhapat* or *Kutumbin*. He occupied a position of authority. **Srenis** or craft-guilds were a normal feature of the Satavahana period. References are found to guilds of oil pressures, Hydraulic machine artisans, potters, weavers, corn dealers, bamboo-workers, and braziers. There must have been many more guilds of which we do not have any information. The prevalence of these guilds shows that the institutions of self

¹⁸ Rama Shankar Tripathi, **History of Ancient India**, 1967, p.157

government were common in the country. The *Srenis* were not only craft or trade guilds. They acted also as Banks. Money could be deposited in those guilds and that money carried interest. Very often perpetual endowments were made to the *Srenis*. It is said that Ushavadata made two permanent endowments to *Kuilika Nigamas* or *Srenis*. The one endowment made provision for new robes and the other for minor food necessities. He could have made provision for feeding and robbing from the local treasury but he preferred to deposit the money in guilds. That was due to the fact that guilds were considered to be more permanent than an empire which could be destroyed at any time.

During the Satavahana period foreign trade and commerce flourished. The Deccan played an important part in the commercial relations of India with the West. The trade between India and the West existed according to the *Periplus of Erythraean Sea*. It is said that ships from western countries sailed down the Red Sea and followed the Arabian coast to *Kane*. From there some ships went to the Indus, some to

Barygaza (Broach) and some to ports of *Lymrika* (Malabar). Ptolemy who wrote only after 6 decades after the writing of the *Periplus* does not mention the name of *Kalyan*. It is possible that *Kalyan* might have become by that time unimportant. Royal encouragement must have played its part. The Roman demand for articles of luxury must have been responsible for commercial activity.¹⁹

According to Dr.D.R.Bhandarkar, the inscriptions of Satavahanas yield very valuable information regarding the social, religious and economic conditions of the Dekkan during their sway.

There were at least four classes of social divisions. Firstly the *Mahabhojas*, the *Maharathis*, and the *Mahasenapatis*, who controlled the *rastras* or districts, comprised the highest rank of society.

The second class included officials like the *Amatyas*, *Mahamatras* and the *Bhandagarkas*; such non-officials as the

¹⁹ Vidya Dhar Mahajan, *Ancient India*, 1967, p.333

Naigama (merchant), *Sarthavaha* (head of the traders), and the *Sresthin* (chief of the trade-guild).

The third class consisted of the *Vaidya* (physician), *Lekhaka* (scribe), *Suvarnakara* (gold smith), *Gandhika* (perfumer), *Halakiya* (cultivator), etc.

The fourth class comprehended the *Malakara* (gardener), *Vardhaki* (carpenter), *Dasaka* (fisherman), *Lohavanija* (blacksmith), etc.

Guilds were a normal feature of the age. Such organizations of corn-dealers (*dhamnikas*), potters, weavers (*kolika-nikayas*), oil pressers (*tilapiska*), braziers (*kasakaras*), bamboo-workers (*vamsakaras*), etc. are found in large number. Besides bringing members of the same caste together, they served as banks, in which money (*aksaya nivi*) could be invested on interest. The currency consisted of *Karsapanas*, both silver and copper, and gold *Suivarnas*. Each *Suvarna* was equivalent to 35 silver *Karsapana* pieces. Trade flourished and ships from the West, laden with merchandise, visited the ports of Broach, Sopara, and Kalyan. The inland marts were Tagara and Paithan. Communications were

generally good, and people freely went from one part of the Dekkan to another on business.²⁰

Persons following the same profession normally organised themselves into guilds (*sreni*), and often lived, or had their business centre, in one ward or street (*vithi*) of the town. The *Jatakas* name at least eighteen such groups. Each had a President (*Pamukha*) or Alderman (*Jetthaka*), whose position was one of great responsibility and honour. Sometimes, to ensure greater cohesion different *vargas* or guilds perhaps combined together under a common head. The *Jatakas* often give a list of eighteen principal crafts. This included the Worker in wood (*Vaddhaki*), Smith (*Kammara*), Worker in stone (*Pasana-kottaka*), Weaver (*Tantu-vāya*), Dyer (*Rangakara*), Potter (*Kuimbha-kara*), Barber (*Nahapaka*).²¹

²⁰ Rama Shankar Tripathi, **History of Ancient India**, 1967, pp. 197-198.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 106

In those days trade, both inland and foreign, was fairly brisk. Merchants made fortunes by dealing in articles like silks, muslins, cutlery, armour, brocades, embroideries, rugs, perfumes, drugs, ivory, ivory-work, jewellery, etc. They went long distances up and down the great rivers of the country, and even undertook voyages to Burma and Ceylon from Tamralipti (*Tamluk*) on the east and from Bharukaccha (Broach) on the west. There are references to voyages as far as Baveru (Babylon). Inland, the traders followed certain well established routes, connecting the various parts of India. One of them ran from Savatthi (*Sravasti*) to *Patitthana* or *Patisthana*; another linked *Savatthi* with *Rajagaha*; a third skirted along the base of the mountains from Taxila to *Sravasti*; and a fourth connected Kasi with the ports of the western coast. These long routes had several intermediate halts, and there were ferries on the way for crossing rivers. In crossing the desert of Rajputana the caravans were guided in the cool of nights by stars under the direction of land-pilots. Brigands infested these routes especially the less frequented ones, and looted merchandise when they could safely do so.

Taxes and *octroi* duties were paid in each state that was crossed. The dangers of robbery on the high way must have raised the prices of commodities very high.²²

Economic organization had never coincided with the abstract order of the castes. It involves special groups, the name of which is *sreni* (*seni* in Pali). This term, which in the Vedic period means a row, an alignment, takes in the *Smritis* the sense of a corporative association for all kinds of workers—tillers of the soil, herdsmen, sailors, artisans, traders, bankers, even Brahmans expert in Veda. The *Mugapakkhajataka* mentions, among eighteen guilds, wood-workers, metal-workers, leather-dressers, and painters. At the head of each corporation was a deacon (*jetthaka*), who acted as president (*pamukha*) and was an important personage at the King's court. It is characteristic of Indian society that a man standing alone counts for nothing. The casteless sought to find pseudo-castes of their own. There were *srenis* even to protect the interest of bandits, highwaymen, and ascetics.

²² Ibid, p.107

Professional occupation is often handed down from father to son, like caste. Thus there were families of smiths, carpenters, potters, which were themselves grouped so as to form villages of smiths, carpenters, and potters. The powers of the guild were legislative, judicial, and executive. Order within the corporation was maintained by rigid discipline, and the King was strictly obliged to safeguard the customs of the guilds and to accept their decisions. The admission of new members and the expulsion of old ones required a decision by the assembly. The merchant guilds did not develop so far as those of the craftsmen. The latter did not enjoy equally high consideration. Basket-makers, potters, weavers, leather-workers, and above all barbers were regarded as men of inferior status, as were butchers and fortune-tellers.²³

²³ Paul Masson-Oursel, Helena De Willman-Grabowska, Philippe Stern, **Ancient India and Indian Civilization**, 1967, p.112.

Historic aspects of craft and trade in Ancient India give us an idea that the Guilds of Medieval India is nothing but a mirror image of the *Srenis* of ancient India.

The process of the evolution of merchant guilds from the Vedic period to ninth century A.D ultimately culminated in the establishment of settlements of traders in different parts of South India. They were popularly known with several names and structural identities. A cursory glance of their style of functioning would definitely help the better understanding of the study. Therefore the presentation of a brief note about them is felt imperative.

Merchant settlements:

In recognition of their market functions the terms such as Cheri, Nagaram, Puram and Pattinam were attached to the merchant settlements in those days.

The *Brahmadeyas* are the villages granted to Brahmins by the rulers in which Brahmins lived as landlords. These land grants were given to them in recognition of their

mastery over Vedas. Those who acquired mastery over four Vedas and got settled in Brahmadeya lands were also known as *Chaturvedi mangalam*.²⁴ *Sabha* a communal self-governing organization was formed in their villages by Brahmins. *Uttiramerur* in the old Chingleput district is the most famous of such villages. It is observed that Brahmins achieved ritual integration of the society by the virtue of their position in the villages.

It is found that Brahmin traders and farmers dominated Brahmadeya villages. These traders enjoyed a close relation with the rulers. The traders were requested by the Chola monarchs to establish Brahmadeyas after the victories of every expedition. No doubt that it restrained the hands of monarchs from disturbing the merchant communities as the farmers and the merchants had the money power.

CHERI:

‘Ur’ is a village while Cheri is an area in a village. But still Thanjavur was never a village as it was the capital of the Cholas. So ‘Ur’ in Tamil is the most common word to signify the dwelling

²⁴ SII, Vol. VIII, No.161, p.73.

places of any community, whereas the cheri is a part of a village in which a particular caste group or traders live.

Paraicheri for the Paraiyas, the **Kammancheri** for the Kammalas, **Ilacheri** for the toddy drawers, **Teendacheri** for the untouchables, **Talaivaycheri** for the people who control main sluice, **Talaicheri** for the people connected to a temple and **Vannaracheri** for washermen are some of the residential areas in the vicinity of the villages.²⁵ It is observed that these dwelling places are specially meant for non-Brahmins.

NAGARAM:

Nagaram was a village mostly inhabited by merchant communities. The administration was conducted by a group of merchants. The administrative body of the Nagaram was also known as "Nagaram". Nagaram as a marketing centre was studied in detail by Kennet R. Hall.²⁶

²⁵. Noboru Karashima, **South Indian History and Society, Studies from Inscription A.D.850-1800**, Delhi, 1984, p.47.

²⁶. Kenneth R.Hall, "**The Nagaram as a Marketing center in Early Medieval South India**". Dissertation, Michigan University, 1975, cited by Meera Abraham.

KANCHIMANAGARAM:

Manimekalai, the sangam literature refers to Kanchipuram as Kanchimanagar to signify the fact that it was a great city. The members of the Kanchipuram Nagaram assembly participated in receiving the future King Nandivarman-II at the gates of the city.²⁷ The assembly of Nagaram was also a guild of Merchants in which Nagarattar was a member. A temple has often been made the nucleus around which a town in course of time grew.²⁸

The commercial importance of the location of certain places was very favourable for the merchant guilds to develop trade. Exports and imports possibly contributed to urban growth. The inscriptions show that urban growth was linked to the growth of commerce.

In the 17th regnal year of Nandivarman-III the members of the Nagaram of Tiruvannamalai agreed to provide one Ulakku of oil for maintaining one perpetual lamp to the deity,

²⁷. SII, Vol.IV, No.136.

²⁸ Appadurai A., **Economic conditions in Southern India 1000-1500 A.D.**, Vol. I (Madras, 1936), pp.338.

Tiruvannamalaiudaiya Nayanar, out of the interest accrued on the 15 Kalanju of gold received from the concubine (bogyar) of *Vanakovaraiyar*.²⁹

GUNAMENAGAIPURAM:

In the Tamil country under the Cholas the creation of Nagaram was known from Chidambaram inscription.³⁰ *Gunamengaipuram* in the neighborhood of *Parakramacholanallur* in *Kidarangonda Cholapperilamai nadu* was created. It was nearer to Perumbarrappouliyar, which is now known as Chidambaram.³¹

Kudiagal and *Kilkalanai* were the two types of traders settled in this Nagaram. *Viyaparigal*, *Vellalar*, *sangarappadiyar*, *Saliyar* and *Pattinavar* came under the first category of people.

²⁹ South Indian Temple Inscriptions, Ed. T.N.Subramaniam, Government Oriental Manuscript Library, Government of Madras, Chennai, No.113.

³⁰ SII, Vol.4, No.223

³¹ Shanmugam.P., "Markets in early Medieval Tamil Country", in **Some Aspects in The History of Tamil Nadu**, Ed. A.Chadrasekaran, Series II, Chennai, 1999, p.8.

Thachar, Kollar, Tattar, Koliyar and other communities were included in the second category of people.

Viyaparigal was a group of traders whereas the Vellalars were the farmers who cultivated their own lands. They were the producers of grains and other agricultural goods. They could have traded in their produce. Sankarapadiyar were those who produced oil. Saliyar were the weavers who produced cloth. Pättinavar were the sea-faring merchants as well as fishermen.

Subordinate workers come under Kilkalani, the second category. *Thachar, Kollar* and *Tattar* were carpenters, blacksmith and goldsmith respectively.

The administration of the temple was left to the members of the Nagaram. Viyaparigal, Saliyar and Sangarappadiyar were the principal members of the Nagaram. Viyaparigal includes all the merchants and traders.

Anjupanchalattar:

The crafts men are conventionally expressed by the numeral “five” as in the terms Panchalar, Panchalattar, Panchakammalar and Anjuvannam. Panchakammalar usually

included goldsmiths, silversmiths, blacksmiths, skilled carpenters and stone cutters. Minting of coins was carried on by the Panchakammalar in those days with Royal patronage. Reference is made to the redundant term Anjupanchalattar in the glossary for South Indian temple inscriptions.³² Their contribution to the trading world is plenty as they are the producers of art and craft goods.

The artisans were called by different names such as panchallatar and kammalas. The Kammalas were artisans and they were known as Panchalas in Canarese region. The Tamil Kammalas were formed by the five occupational sections namely *Kollan* (Blacksmith), *Thachan* (Carpenter), *Thattan* (Goldsmith), *Silpasari* or *Kal-thachan* (Sculptor or stone-mason) and *Kannan* (Brass-smith). They were employed on the temple construction work and were paid lands in lieu of cash payment. Stone-masons were in the service of temples and they were paid from temple lands.³³

³² SITI, Glossary p. XVIII and p. VI.

³³ Jaya Selva Doss, "Social divisions in Padaividu Rajyam in medieval Tamil Nadu", in **Some Aspect in the History of Tamil Nadu**; A Study in socio political cultural spheres, Ed. Dr.A.Chandrasekaran, Series-II, Chennai, 1999, p.118.

Among the weavers Kaikolas were the prominent caste of the Tamil weavers. The name Kaikolan means the man who handles the shuttle. The word “Kai” refers to hand and “Kolan”, the shuttle. They lived generally around the temple precincts and had separate streets.³⁴ The Kaikolar, the Tamil speaking caste were the largest in number and were settled mainly in the districts of the Arcot, Salem, Coimbatore and Chingleput with small concentration in the southern districts of Tanjore, Trichinopoly, Madura and Tinnevely. They were called by the name **Sengundar** (red dagger). *Mahanattan*, the territorial chief in Kanchipuram was recognized by Kaikolar. This caste used the titular names of Mudali and Nayanar.³⁵

The villages near the east coast with significant concentration of Kaikolar and Devanga communities of weavers were served by the ports like Madaras, Sadrapatnam, Pondicherry, Porto-Novo, Tranquebar and Nagapatnam.

³⁴ Ibid., p.116.

³⁵ Edgar Thurston., **Castes and Tribes of Southern India**, vol. III, 1909.

In the different residential areas for different social groups, the production of various goods and the grading activities were sustained. From the word “*ivvurodo erina*”, it is inferred that a group of villages was incorporated into a *nagaram*. They were actually the centres of production and commerce with a division of labour based on caste difference that existed in those villages.

PATTINAM:

Pattinam is a seat of trade and commerce located mostly on the seashore. It is an urban trading centre. It is true that the men of Pattinam lived by trade and craft. Pattinam was not an ordinary dwelling place as it was a melting spot of different trade culture. The commercial prospectus of pattinam always impressed the merchant from different places. The pattinam was mostly a sea-port. External trade accelerated the growth of the ports presumably. The trade contributed to the growth of Market Towns. The guilds of merchants raised the foundations of the house of trade and commerce mostly near the sea-port.

Press, communication and the political system are the facilities required for the corporate mobility in the modern time. In the absence of these facilities there was a slow corporate mobility in the medieval time. Some of the changes that were taking place appeared inevitable. They raise many important issues, which deserve serious study of medieval trade.

During the medieval period large tracts of suitable lands for cultivation facilitated the establishment of agrarian settlements. The seaport facilities were the main cause for the establishment of Pattinam. The export and import activities contributed much to the development of the Pattinam. The trading community had ample reasons to have their settlements at Pattinam.

The collective welfare of the society was the responsibility of the traders. To cope with the vagaries of the market, Guilds of Merchants had to guarantee the minimum standards of business ethics through conglomeration of different merchant groups in the Pattinam.

Pattinam is a general term referring to any centre of trade near the seashore. In the history of South India, many such notable centres of trade or cities of flourishing market had emerged which played a conspicuous role in the economic activities of the people. To cite a few, Nagappattinam, Kaveripattinam, Kulasekara pattinam, Vishakapattinam, Sonahar Pattinam, Erivirappattinam are some of the historically significant pattinams which deserve special reference in the context of the study of merchant guilds in South India.

NAGAPPATTINAM:

Quilon, Kodungallur and Nagapattinam are the solid examples for market towns. In Chola times Nagapattinam was probably the main port for exchange of goods. Nagapattinam was used as a port of trade. It was busy with export and import activity. The traders negotiated sales, purchase and exchange of their products. There was very great abundance of pepper, ginger and of enough cinnamon in the ports for export. The significance of the contacts of Tamil merchants in South East Asia is perhaps best exemplified by the construction of a Buddhist shrine in A.D.1005



at Nagapattinam, the most important Coromandel port at that time. The shrine was supported by grants from the ruler of the Malaysian Kingdom of Srivijaya as well as from the Chola ruler Rajaraja the First.³⁶

KAVERIPATTINAM:

Pattinappalai, one of the eight anthologies of the Sangam literature is a long poem in Tamil on Kaveripattinam, the Chola capital. The description of Kaveripattinam in *Pattinappalai* gives a vivid idea of the state of industry and commerce at that time. This seaport was also known as Poombukar Nagaram. The **Nalangadi**, the day market and **Alangadi**, the night market existed in Kaveripattinam.

KULASEKARAPATTINAM:

Eleven groups of Nagarattar including the Nagarattar of Aruvimanagaram alias KulasekaraPattinam in Kerala Singa Valanadu attended the meeting at Piranmalai in the Tirupattur taluk

³⁶ Burton Stein, **All the Kings' Mana**, 1984, Madras, p.229

of former Ramanathapuram District.³⁷ The Piranmalai hill borders the neighboring Tirumayam taluk of Pudukkottai. The ports of Tondi and Kayal were nearest to Piranamalai.

VISHAKAPATTINAM:

It is one of the greatest seaports in the Bay of Bengal. From an inscription found in **Vishakapattinam** the mercantile interest of Tamil merchants along the Andhra coast is traced.³⁸ The *Ainnurruvar* sponsored *Ainnurruvar perumpalli*, a Jain temple. A group called the '*Anjuvannathu-Vyapari*' who was probably Arab Muslim traders was mentioned in this inscription.³⁹ There were traffic and trade between the neighbouring states by mutual good will. The presence of *ainnurruvar* and *anjuvannattar* merchants in Vishakapattinam is sufficient to prove the expansion of Tamil Mercantile interest into Andhra. Vishakapattinam under the influence of Tamil became *Kulottunga Chalapattinam*.⁴⁰

³⁷ SII, VIII, 442.

³⁸ SII, X, 651, A.D.1090

³⁹ Meera Abraham, **Two Medieval Merchant Guilds of South India**, 1988, p.62.

⁴⁰ ARE 99 of 1909, Rangacharya, III, p.1663.

SONAHAR PATTINAM:

In A.D.642 Kodungalur Musuri was visited by Muslims from West Sea. The Muslim traders who came to Chera Nadu in the beginning moved also to Pandiya and Chola Nadu later. It is made clear that Muslims settled in Kayalpattinam in A.D.711 and in Trichy in A.D.734. Kayalpattinam in the East coast was known as **Sonahar** Pattinam at that time.

In the end of 14th century, the king of Kerala Nadu, Udhaya Marthanda Varman went on a pilgrimage to Thiruchendur in the Tamil country. On the way to Thiruchendur from Kayal he saw the *Kattur Maqdhum palli*, which was known, as *Periya pallivasal* (Big mosque) in Veerapandiyan pattanam. It was found by him in a dilapidated condition. The king renovated the Mosque and gave his name to it as Udhayamarthanda perumpalli (Big mosque of Udhaya Marthandan). Abubacker Khaziyar, the employee to lead the prayer was given the title '*Udhaya Marthanda Abubacker Khaziyar*' by the King.⁴¹

⁴¹Erasu, S. '**Velalar Kula Theiyvam**,' in Yeegaipperunal Malar, Dhinamani, 2001, p.100.

ratified a resolution converting an aghara Velur or Rajadhiraja Chaturvedimangalam into an Erivirapattinam.⁴⁴ Erivirapattinam were the establishments peculiar to Tamil areas in 11th century. Erivirar refers to a class of warriors associated with the mercantile communities. Nanadisis met at Mylapore and converted Ayyapulal Kattur into an Erivirapattinam.⁴⁵

NADUKAL:

Nadukal in Tamil is a word to signify an erected stone to glorify a warrior. In those days of mercantile activities a consort was granted by the reigning monarch to every consortium of itinerant merchants. The soldiers accompanying these merchants were strong and unfailing warriors. They were undeterred by the evil designs of the thieves on the way. If a warrior was killed in an encounter with gangsters a '**nadukal**' was erected to glorify the warrior who defended the caravan of merchants by sacrificing his

⁴⁴ Venkatarama Ayyar, K.R., "**Medieval Trade, Craft and Merchant Guilds in South India**". JIH, 25, pt, 1 (1947), p.277.

⁴⁵ ARE, 1912-13, pp.99-100.

life. The burdens of soldiers were heavy throughout the journey through the jungles.

One such '**nadukal**' was found in July 1995 A.D by Tamil Nadu Archaeology department, on the roadside of 'Hogenakkal' Highways. The warrior in this '**nadukal**' appears to get ready to throw his dagger at the enemy. The warriors were rightly known as **Erivirar**. The literal meaning of the word **Erivirar** is a warrior who throws. In this **nadukal**, a horse is depicted by the side of the right leg of the warrior. It is believed that the **Eriviran** was riding the horse defending the Caravan of traders. Some soldiers are in the fighting posture at his left. No inscription is found in it. But the two stone slabs found near this '**nadukal**' bear inscriptions. It is inscribed as '**Konda Chola**' in the first line and '**Ayirathu Ainnurru...**' in the second line. In all probability this inscription refers to **Thisai Ayirathu Ainnurruvar** of Jayangonda Chola **mandalam**. It is most likely that this Eriviran accompanied the merchants traveling from Chola mandal to other parts of the country. He would have been killed in an encounter with waylaid thieves. By the discovery of this rare **nadukal** it is concluded that

the present Highways to Hogenakal was in vogue since 14th century, connecting Tamil country with Karnataka. In this part of the landscape a highway known as *Adiyaman Peruvali* from Thagadur tends towards Navarthalam. It is found from this that it was an important trade route in 14th and 15th centuries. It is deduced that a particular account of an incident in the history of merchant groups is depicted in this sculpture.⁴⁶

In an inscription of 19th regnal year of Mahendravarman, a Vanigar (Merchant) was referred as Uralum, which means an administrator. The vanigar died in a battle and a hero stone was installed in his memory.⁴⁷

In the medieval period the maritime trade goods were mostly of perishable. So it is hardly expected to get any traces of the goods as proof. Foreign coins constitute evidence of the presence of foreign goods and of foreigners in the Coromandel Coast. The inscriptions on stones are the unshakable evidence of foreign trade.

⁴⁶ Dhinamani (Tamil Daily), July, 1995

⁴⁷ Dharmapuri Kalvettukkal (DK). **Tamil Nadu State department of Archaeology**, Chennai. Vol.I, p.82, 1972/21.

The taxes on foreign goods and the names of merchant guilds are mentioned in the inscriptions.

MAJOR AND MINOR GROUPS:

Anjuvannam, Ainnurruvar, Ayyavole, Manigramam and Nanadesi are the major merchant guilds identified in the inscriptions of medieval South India. Epigraphically evidences are available for affiliate groups also and they are treated as minor groups.

Hanjamana, Nagarattar, Setti, Settiguttas, Settiputras, Okkals, Okkalu, Nakaras, Mummuridandas, Birundas, Brahman, Brahmasetti, Biravanigas, gavares, gatrigas, kavares, kandalis, Valattugai, Idangai Velaikkarar, Valangiar, kongavalas, Pattanasvami, Eriviras and Munaiviras are some of the affiliate groups mentioned in the available inscriptions.

Among these major and minor groups of merchants, **Anjuvannam** is the most conspicuous one whose trading activity was commendable and religious identity questionable. The organisational and structural frame work of this merchant guild **Anjuvannam** and their contributions to the commercial developments during the medieval period of South India are worthy aspects of study.

CHAPTER—III

ANJUVANNAM

Anjuvannam was an organisation of traders. But there was a doubt among the scholars in the beginning whether Anjuvannam was a mercantile organisation of Arabs, Jews, Christians, Persians or Arab Muslims or a mixed group. This controversy was raised by Hermann Gundert, a German scholar and a missionary who visited Malabar during 19th century and the first scholar to study the Copper plates of *Kottayam*. An in-depth study of the age-old commercial contact between South India and Arabs would give clues to the better understanding of the subject and establish not only the religious identity of *Anjuvannam* but also its structure and role as a predominant Merchant guild of the medieval period.

ARABS IN THE WEST COAST:

Sailing guides and topographies of the Arabs largely mention the trading stations and commodities of trade. These were strong evidence of commercial contact between West Asia and the west coast of India in the ninth century.

According to Dr.K.K.Pillay, "There is more dependable evidence from early Tamil literature. The Greek merchants in Tamil Nadu were known as **Yavanas**; obviously that name was derived from the Ionians who formed a section of the Greeks. Subsequently the term came to be applied to the Romans, and still later, to all foreigners, including the Arabs."¹ The close commercial relations between the Tamils and the **Yavanas** are mentioned in some of the **Sangam** classics as well as in the twin Epics namely **Silappadikaram** and **Manimegalai**. The significance of these literary evidences was that it tallies remarkably with the data furnished by the Greek writers of the early centuries of Christian era. The notes of Pliny, the Periplus, Ptolemy and Strabo

¹ Pillay K.K., **A Social History of the Tamils**, vol I, University Madras, 1975,p.253

corroborate the information available in Sangam classics and Arikamedu excavations.

The trading ships of Arabia proceeded to Malabar. The merchants from Arabia who were known as *Yavanar* had their settlement in the coastal areas of peninsular India. The verses quoted below from '**Perungadhai**', the Tamil poem clearly refer to these villages as *Yavanacheri* and *Yavanappadi*.

விழிப்பெருஞ் செல்வ மொடு வென்றி தாங்கிய

அயம்பதின் இரட்டி யவனச் சேரியும்

-மகத காண்டம் மூன்றாம் பகுதி-காதை 4; பாடல் 7-8

"*Vizhupperunchelvamodu Venrithangia*

Aimpathin iratti Yavana cheriyum. . ."²

-Magadha gandam, part 3, Kadai 4: 7-8

² **Perungadhai** is a seventh century Tamil poem. It was written by **Kongu Velir**.

அமரிய நண்பிற் றமருளுந் தமராம்,
யவனப் பாடி ஆடவர் தலைமகன்

-இலாவாணகாண்டம், பகுதி-2, காதை 8; பாடல் 167-168

“Amariya Nanbin Thamarulum Thamaram

*Yavanappadi Aadavar Thalaimagan”*³

-Ilavana gandam, part 2, Kadai 8: 167-168

Yavana cheri was a street where the *Yavana* warriors were stationed whereas the *Yavanappadi* was the residential area for those people who came from *Yavanam*. In the Tamil literature the word *yavanar* stands to signify the Greeks and Romans. After seventh century A.D. the Arabs who settled in the coastal areas of the peninsular India were indicated as *Yavanar* or *Sonahar* in Tamil.

The trade route to India was discovered during the medieval period by the Europeans who were badly in need of spices. The extensive coast and the availability of spices attracted foreign

³ Ibid

merchants to the Malabar Coast from very early time. The Arabs knew the West Coast of India as Malabar. Al Biruni appears to have been the first to call the country by its proper name, Malabar. The word Malabar is therefore probably, in part at least, of foreign origin. The first two syllables are almost certainly the Dravidian word *Mala* which means hill or mountain and *Bar* is probably the Arabic word. *Barr* means land or ground. The word Malabar was applied to the coast by the Arab navigators. The seafaring population came here for pepper and other spices. The relationship between the Arabs and the Malabar Coast was based mainly on trade. Many Arab settlers in the area engaged themselves in literary, religious and mercantile activities.

Sardar K M Panikkar says that from very early period Kerala had been in contact with the Arabian coast and that traders especially from Muscat and other centres of the Arabian Peninsula used to frequent the Malabar ports. Pepper grown in Kerala was an essential item for the people in the cold area. Mecca was on the trade route for goods from China, India and African coast in the south and from Damascus and Constantinople in the North. Arab

merchants sailed to the coasts of India and Africa for trade. From 9th to 16th century foreign trade of the West Coast was the monopoly of the Arabs.

Since pepper was available in Kerala alone at that time, it is clear that Arabs had contact with Kerala before the introduction of Islam. Goods were taken from the Indian coast to that of Yemen and to Syria passing along the Red sea coast.

There were other reasons also for the Arab contact with Kerala. The Arabs on account of its fisheries and trade in pepper knew Kerala from very early time. The Arab merchants had made commercial establishments centuries before the rise of Islam. This also led to the Arab contact with Kerala.

According to Commander K Sreedharan, Arabs were known as sea - farers even before the birth of Islam, but they seem to have redoubled their efforts at oceanic commerce after the advent of Islam. During Shri Vijaya-Chola age (11th century AD) the Arabs reached the zenith of maritime commerce and by the end of the

Hindu period they held a complete monopoly in over - seas trade. The takeover of trade from the South Indian merchants by the Arab middle-men apparently came about the end of Chola power. The decline of Chola power had created a vacuum in overseas commerce and the Arabs stepped in.⁴

The relations between the Zamorins and the Arab traders became intimate during course of A.D 13th and 15th centuries. Calicut slowly attained a pre - eminence in trade of pepper and other spices which made it the greatest emporium on the West Coast. Gradually Muslims monopolised the external trade of the coast. Malabar's pepper, cardamom and textiles, which were also in great demand, were shipped from the port. As a result the *Zamorins* became one of the wealthiest rulers in India and the most powerful on the West Coast.

A Muslim inscription in Pantalayini Kollam in North Malabar dated Hijra 166 (752 AD) is sufficient evidence for it.

⁴ The Heritage Society, **First Ismaili Electronic Library and Database**, 2004

With the growth of Arab commercial activity under the Caliphs, Malabar ports became popular among the traders of Muslim capitals. Numerous Arab travelers speak of Malabar ports in their works. Most notable among them are Ibn Khudradbeh (256 - 272 AH / 869 - 885 AD) and Abu Zayd of Zirag (304 AH / 916 AD).⁵

Ahmad al-Baladhuri (279 Ah/ 892 AD), the famous historian corroborates the existence of intimate commercial contact between Arab Muslims and South India in general, Malabar coast in particular and points out the existence of the settlement of Arab Muslim colonies in Malabar Coast long before the Arab conquest of Sindh by Mohammed –Bin –Qasim. He says,

Arab merchants frequented Ceylon on maritime activities. Some of the Muslim families had settled there for trade. When the senior members of them died the native king sent the remaining ones to Hajjaj Ibn Yusuf (115 AH / 734 AD) the Governor of Kufa with some

⁵ Ibid

*beautiful presents for him. But the ship was plundered by pirates at Dhabil in Sind. On hearing this report, Hajjaj sent an army under Muhammed Ibn Qasim who attacked Sindh in 91 AH/ 710 AD. This incident occurred during the reign of Caliph al-Wahid ibn Abdul Malik ibn Marwan (86 - 96 AH/ 701 - 715 AD). At about the same time Arab Muslims had settled in Malabar also.*⁶

The presence of Muslim groups in the different port towns of Kerala, which were able to secure recognition of the governments in the country, is proved by the Tarisappali Copper Plates (849 AD). One such group attested the grant in Arabic in Kufic characters, which included the names of eleven witnesses namely, Maimun ibn Ibrahim, Muhammad ibn Main, Salih ibn Ali, Uthman ibn Al Marziban, Muhammad ibn Yahya, Amr ibn Ibrahim, Ibrahim ibn al-Tayyi, Bakr ibn Mansur, Al-Qasim ibn Hamid, Mansur ibn Isa and Ismail ibn Yaqub.⁷ Meera Abraham also

⁶ Ibid

⁷ Ibid

quotes the same list of signatories using “**son of**” for the Arabic word ‘**ibn**’ in all the names.⁸

During the early centuries of the Hijra, the Arab contact was mainly with the rulers of the two cities of Cannanore and Calicut, whose prosperity depended mostly on the export trade in pepper and spices. This has been attested by all authorities. Ibn Batuta (779 A.H / 1378 AD) declares that the Moors of Malabar were extremely so rich that one of their leading merchants could purchase the whole freightage of a vessel. The *Mammalis* and *Koya Musas* were merchant princes with whom Cairo and Damascus were as familiar as Calicut and Cannanore.

Arabs came to Kerala mainly for trade. Along with traders, Arab scholars also made their way to Kerala who settled here, established centres of Arabic learning and made their contributions to Arabic language and literature. Some of them, the Makhdums of

⁸ Meera Abraham, **Two Medieval Merchant Guilds of South India**, 1988, p.22

Ponnani, the Qadi family of Calicut, the Ba Alavis of Mampuram and the Bukharis of Chawghat deserve special mention.⁹

Abu Zayad, the Arab traveler of the ninth century AD mentions, "The Arabs of Oman take the carpenter's tool - box with them and go to the places where the coconut grows in abundance. First they cut down the tree and leave it to dry. When it is dry, they cut into planks. They weave ropes of coir. With this rope they tie the planks together and make them a vessel. They make its flagpole from the same wood. When the boat is ready, they take a cargo of coconuts and sail for Umman. They make huge profits in this trade.

Hooked iron nails were used to fasten together conventional pieces of wood in reverse to make the floorboard of the boats in India. Plank fastening method was indigenous. Boats built in reverse-clinker planking may have been a purely cultural one. Medieval Arab geographers had the clear concepts of currents, tides and winds in the Indian Ocean. They reached Malabar Coast for trade.

⁹ Heritage Society, op.cit

Mariners have sailed the Indian Ocean and dropped anchor along the southwest coast of Malabar to buy pepper, cardamom, and timber. Archaeologists have long assumed that no boats would have survived the depredations of time, climate, invertebrates, and microorganisms.¹⁰

While digging up a field, villagers in Kerala made the unprecedented discovery of a seventy-foot timber boat. The wood has now been dated to sometime between the thirteenth and fifteenth centuries A.D. According to V. **Selvakumar** of the Centre for Heritage Studies in Tripunithura, Kerala, and the other archaeologists excavating the boat the relic implies about late medieval shipbuilding techniques in southern India. This boat has been discovered, surprisingly well preserved by having been permanently waterlogged and covered in silt.

The Kerala boat has a flat bottom and a boxlike stern, as did many Chinese boats of the period. It also has iron fastenings, even though the shipbuilders of medieval South Asia reputedly used no iron. An eleventh-

¹⁰ T.J. Kelleher, "Ship Builders of Medieval Malabar", **Natural History**, Dec, 2004

century Indian treatise advises that the metal be avoided lest magnetic rocks drag a boat to its doom. And the points of some of the iron nails have been flattened in a way characteristic of northern European shipbuilding. Altogether, the craft displays the skill of the boatmen.¹¹

ARABS IN THE EAST COAST:

From the beginning of 7th century the Arabs sailed through the Arabian Sea to the South Indian coast. Al-Mathiya, Athalaya, Bargattim, Keppal, Chatri, Yuska, Jala, Kayyal, Giyattu and Jambuguva were some of the Arab names for their vessels to travel through the sea.¹²

During 8th century A.D. Arabs came by sea and settled for business in the coastal towns like *Nagore*, *Nagappattinam* and *Tharangampadi*. Shahul Hammed Badshaw Nayagam, the Quraishi

¹¹ "The **Thaikkal-Kadakkarappally** boat: An archaeological example of medieval shipbuilding in the western Indian Ocean," **International Journal of Nautical Archaeology** 33:253-63, October 2004

¹² **Thamizhar vazhvil,mozhiyil,Ilakkiyathil Islathin thakkam**, (Tamil), Research volume, 2003, Department of Tamil, Islamiah College, Vaniyambadi, p.160

family descendant of the Prophet Mohammad came to India and stayed at **Vanchur** near Karikkal for meditations. His tomb is now in Nagore near Nagappattinam. These Arabs married the girls of Tamil 'Marakayars' who were living in the coastal area. After their contact with the Arabs the Marakayars developed the business.

Marakayars live predominantly in the East Coast along the Bay of Bengal, starting from Cuddalore to Kanyakumari. The Tamil is their mother tongue. All of them are followers of Islam. Depending on their profession, business and the mother tongue the Muslims of Tamil Nadu are classified as Marakayar, Rauthar, Labbai and Dekani. Still these are not caste divisions. There are no backward or forward class feelings among them. Marakayars mostly belong to the *Shafi* School of thought under *Sunnath* Jamath. The word *Maraikalam* in Tamil means ship. *Rayar* is to signify bold man, Captain or Lord. As they were soldiers or captains in Navy, they were called '*Maraikalarayar*'. Later on this word became '*Marakayar*'.

Fifty kilometers away from Chennai, *Pazhaverkadu* is situated. Prawn fish catching is the occupation of the people living here. They are the progeny of Arabs. These people came from *Sonaham* to India by ship around 700 years ago. The word *Sonaham* should be taken to include Arabia and neighbouring countries.

The peninsular Arabia is identified as *Sonaham* from where the *Sonahars* are supposed to have come. They disembarked at Kayalapattinam, Adirampattinam, Butkal, Thalaicherry and Pazhaverkadu. This sea-faring community settled in and around the sea-ports of peninsular India. Around 250 direct descendants of this race are living in Pazhaverkadu in the coromandal coast.

There were no settlements of fishermen when these people landed on the shore.¹³ The dwellers of Pazhaverkadu have the features of Arabians. Now they speak Tamil. They have forgotten

¹³ **Interview** with 93 years old Mohamed Jhon , Town Khaji, Pazhaverkadu, December, 2002.

their Arabic language. These '**Sonahar**' were mainly fishermen at pazhaverkadu. Making handicrafts from palm-leaves, trading and farming are now part of their livelihood. They were merchants by profession. Threads were brought from Kanchipuram on those days and given to the weavers for dyeing and weaving *lungies* which were known as **Palayakat lungies**. The *lungies* were sent for sale to *Banko* at Thailand which was known as Siam Town on those days. At that time stone polishing work were also undertaken by them. Stones were brought from Gummidipoondi for polishing to make Diamonds.¹⁴

These people are living as a group. There is an organization called *Baithulmal* for the benefit of the poor. A fixed cess is levied on the members of the group. Most of their ancestral buildings are in dilapidated condition. Some of them are still living in those old buildings. *Masjid-e-Musharaf Jamiah*, built of granite stones in Hijri 1334 is their main hall of prayer. A novel clock which reads time by the sun shade of a vertical rod is located in this Mosque.

¹⁴ Ibid.

The *Sonahar* do not come out of their exclusion even in their matrimonial relations. A vertical shift away from their old habits and attitudes towards marriage has only just begun. The dowry system does not exist in this group. Among this mercantile community *Maher*, the cash award is in vogue.

Rainwater harvesting is one of their family culture followed right from the beginning. This traditional practice still exists among them. Mud pots made of *Pasi*, particular clay brought from Thailand, are used for storing rainwater. *Jadi*, the water pot has a capacity to hold 250 litres of harvested water. The water stored in a season is used as drinking water until the subsequent rain season sets in. Every house has at least a dozen pots of rainwater. The rainwater is sterilised by dipping a hot iron rod into the pot of water. The water continues to be pure for more than six months.¹⁵ This practice is an unbroken cultural memory of this people. The hope of many people here is to copy the lifestyles of affluent city

¹⁵ Ababeel, '**Marabin Maintharkal**', In Yeegaipperunal Malar (Tamil), Dinamani, December 2002, pp.138-139

people, while the orthodox people hold fast to the visions of past living standards.

The glorious past of the society of **Sonahar** is lost in the currents of change. One is led to believe that its survival might be in danger due to shrinking population and melting culture. Propelling them with graceful and powerful strokes, the history of Arabian Diaspora unfolds.

They have 1200 years of long and uninterrupted history. They claim that they belong to *Syed Vamsam*, the direct descendant of Prophet Mohammad. These people believe that the majority of Muslims in Tamil Nadu is identified as '*Labbai*' in resonance to their slogans of *Labbaik*.

They call themselves '**Shaikar**'. The word '**Shai**' means nothing but the over-coat worn by the Arabs. But now they are addressed as **Sayakar** in Tamil, to identify them with their dyeing work for palm-leaves as *sayam* refers to colour in Tamil. The adult

In the light of historical information discussed above, it is clearly understood and undisputedly established that there were intimate commercial contacts between Arabia and South India and that the Arab merchants had established their settlements mostly in coastal region and emerged as a powerful and influential merchant group. This historical process ultimately resulted in the formation of their own merchant guilds which came to be known as **Anjuvannam**.

Anjuman is a Persian word to signify an association or a guild of service. *Hanjamana* refers to a guild of merchants in the medieval Karnataka. A hero stone of AD 1427 at Kaikini, in South Kanara refers to *Hanjamana*. From the description and context it is clear that they were Muslims, Arabs or Persians.¹⁷ It has been suggested that the term “*hanjamana*” is linked with the Persian *Anjuman*, an association. *Hanjamana* may be similar to Anjuvannam of Tamil country, as it is believed that *anjuman* is the

¹⁷ Annual Report on kannada Research in Bombay Province, No.48, (1939-40) Cited by Meera Abraham.

root word of **Anjuvannam**. **Anjuvannam** was a guild of Muslim merchants in Tamil country during the medieval period.

There were other reasons to establish that the Muslim group that did not come under the four castes (*Naluvannam*) of the Tamil Country came to be known as **Anjuvannam** to identify the fifth group. It is related that the Arab Muslims came in five groups to Kayalpattinam, the port town in the east coast of the Tamil country. The first group was the descendant of the first Caliph Abu Bakr. The second group was the progeny of the second Caliph Umar; the third one was the offspring of Caliph Udhman and the fourth was the descendant of Caliph Ali. The fifth group comprised the servants. Kaviko Abdul Rahman is of the firm opinion that these five groups of Arab Muslims who came to Kayalpattinam were called **Anjuvannathar** by Tamilians. Thus **Anjuvannam** (five colours) in Tamil refers to Muslim guilds in the Tamil country.¹⁸

¹⁸Interview with Kaviko Abdul Rahman, Jan, 2006. He is an eminent Tamil Professor, a famous poet, and a Sahitya Academy award winner for his literary works in Tamil language.

References to **Anjuvannam** first came in the copper plates of Kottayam. These plates were found from Kottayam, which was under the rule of Cheran Thanu Ravi. On paleographical grounds it is deduced that the style of writing belongs to the end of 9th century A.D. or the beginning of the 10th century. They are inscribed in *Vattezhuttu* characters of ninth century or early tenth century. Tamil is the language of the inscription.

Theerthandathanapuram near Tondi in the Thiruvadanai Taluk of old Ramanathapuram District has an inscription of mid-thirteenth century. This inscription of 1220 A.D mentions that *Vaduvazhvar*, a lady started the construction work of a temple at Theerthandathanapuram. It came to a grinding halt in the mid way. To complete this work **Anjuvannam**, **Manigramam** and the leader of *Samanthappanda Salai* met to decide the certain amount of levy of cess on articles of trade.¹⁹

¹⁹ ARE, 598 of 1926-27

Marvan Sapir Isa built Tarisappalli, a church at Quilon according to the *Kottayam cheppedu* (copper plate). The word *Anjuvannam* appears immediately after the above information about **Tarisappalli**. H Gundert was the first scholar to analyze and translate the copper plates.²⁰ Later on Gopinath Rao studied the copper plate inscriptions and gave his interpretation and translation. “*Cochi Cheppedu*” (Cochi copper plates) belongs to Baskara Ravivarman period. He was a contemporary of Raja Raja Cholan. The language of the inscriptions stands tall and strong.

Among the Muslims of the Tamil Country a group of Merchants, known by the term *Anjuvannam* is clearly mentioned in a Tamil Poem about Nagappattinam from a collection of Old Songs found in Saraswati Mahal Library at Thanjavur.²¹

²⁰ Gundert, Rev.H, “**Translation and Analysis of the ancient documents engraved on copper in possession of the Syrian Christians and Jews of Malabar.**” MJLS,13, pt.1. (1844), p.115.

²¹ Sadasiva Pandarathar, T.V., **Kalvettukkal Koorum Unmaigal**, 2003, p.19.

And it reads...

குடக்கினிற் றுரங்கமும் வடக்கினிற் கலிங்கமும்
 குணக்கினிற் பசும்பொனும் குளித்த தெற்கிலாரமும்
 அடிப்பரப்படைக்கலத் தனேக வண்ணமாக வந்து
 அஞ்ச வண்ணமு ந்தழைத்து அறத்தின் வண்ணமானவூர்

Kudakinir Thurangamum Vadakkinir Kanlingamum

Kunakkiuir Pasumponum Kulitha Therkil Aramum

Adipparappa Adaikkalathu Aneha Vannamaga Vandu

Anjuvannamum Thazhaithu Arathin Vannamanavur

Horses from west, dress materials from north, Gold from east and pearls from south were imported for Anjuvannam. Anjuvannam grew in flying colours and made the place a village of integrity and charity. The last line of this poem which is not given here refers to this village as *Nagai* (Nagappattinam).

An Inscription ²² in Tamil refers to a part of Ervadi town in Tirnelveli District, as Puliyur Anjuvannam. Muslims thickly populate Ervadi. Anjuvannam is yet another name of a place in Kanyakumari District. The name of a street in Tondi with large Muslim population is Anjuvannam. A Mosque in Tiruvidangodu near Tenkasi is known by the name **Anjuvannappalli**.²³ **Maiyavadi** (a Muslim graveyard) in Tirividangodu is known by the name ‘**Anjuvannam Maiyavadi**’. The name **Anjuvannam** has come to stay with the Muslim Society. **Anjuvnnathar** are the ancestors of the **Marakayar** Muslims of East Coast. Thus from all available references to Anjuvannam in Tamil Country it is clearly and undoubtedly established that the Tamil Muslims were identified by the name **Anjuvannam** or **Anjuvannathar** as a group.

²² Plate S.R., Gazetteer of Tirunelveli

²³ Paramasivan, **Panpattu Asaivukal** (Tamil), 2001, p.93

The term *marakkala-nayan* may be related to the term *marakkayar*, which was attached to sea-faring Muslim merchants of both the Coromandel and Malabar coasts of south India in the fifteenth century.²⁴ Norobu Karashima suggests that this term might refer to the ship's owner.

The Poet Ali Pulavar in his **Mehraj Malai** adds credit to the *Anjuvanna* Muslims for their philanthropy. And he sung...

அண்டர் தருவென கொடுக்கும்

அஞ்சுவண்ண முசுலிமவர்கள்

-மெகராசுமாலை

'Andar Tharuvena Kodukkum

Anjuvanna Muslimavargal'

--Mehraj Malai.²⁵

²⁴ Norobu Karashima, "Indian Commercial Activities in Ancient and Medieval Southeast Asia" (Paper delivered at the Conference of the International Association of Tamil Research, 1995), p. 8.

²⁵ **Mehraj Malai** is a sixth century poem in Tamil. It was written by **Ali Pulavar**.

In this poem the Muslim merchants were signified as *Anjuvannam* and the Tamil Poet illustrates their noble and generous character of alms giving, comparing them with a tree in the Heaven which gives fruits with no limit.

The merchant groups functioned as semi-independent groups. They were only merchant groups from the plural society and not religious groups. For their safety they maintained a small group of armed men.

Another notable literary source to establish the religious identity of Anjuvannam is **Palsanthamalai**. It is an eighth century eulogy in Tamil on a **Calipha** from kayalpattinam. It refers vividly to *Yavana Calipha* and *Anjuvannam* merchants in different verses quoted here.

இயவன ராசன் கலுபதி தாமுத லெண்ண வந்தோர்

அயன்மிகு தானையர் அஞ்ச வண்ணத்தவர் அஞ்சலென்னா.....

-பல்சந்தமாலை

'Yavana Rasan Kalupathi Tham mudal EnnaVanthore

Ayanmihu Thanaiyar Anjuvannathavar....., ²⁶

-Palsanthamalai

Taking *Kalifa*, the *Yavana* king as their leader **Anjuvannam** with a big army for protection lived in harmony. In this verse *Thanaiyar* in Tamil denotes Army. It is also established that *Yavana* in this poem refers to Arab Caliph.

வானது நாணக் கொடையா லுலகை வளர்த்தருளும்

சோனகர் வாழுஞ்செழும் பொழில் சூழ்ந்து

- பல்சந்தமாலை

"Vanathu Nana Kodaiyal Ulagai Valarthu Arulum

Sonahar Vazhum Sezhum pozhil Soozhnthathu" ²⁷

-Palsanthamalai

To the extent of making the sky to feel shy, Sonahar leading a prosperous life filled the world with charity (*kodai*). Muslim merchants are identified as Sonahar.

²⁶ Mailai Seeni Venkatasami, **Marainthu Pona Thamizh Noolgal**, (Tamil), 2001, pp.43-45

²⁷ Ibid, pp.43-45

வச்சிர நாட்டு இறையாகிய கலுபா முதலானவர்

“*Vachira Nattu Irai Agia Kaluba Mudal Anavar*”²⁸

The Calipha of Vachira Nadu as a ruler was the leader of the people (*Anjuvannam*). It is very clear that the Muslim merchants (*Anjuvannathu viyabarigal*) acknowledge the leadership and supremacy of the Caliph, who was also the religious head.

எல்லா முணர்ந்தவர் ஏழ்பெருந் தேரங்கத்து யவனர்கள்
அல்லா எனவந்து சதிதியுந்தார வகை தொழுஞ்சீர்
நல்லார் பயிலும் பழனங்கள் சூழ்தரும் நாட்டகமே

- பல்சந்தமாலை

“*Yellam unarnthavar yezh perunthangathu yavanargal*

Allah yena vndhu sathithiyunthara vahai thozhum seer

Nallar payilum pazhanangal soozhtharu nattagamay” ...²⁹.

-Palsanthamalai

²⁸ Ibid

²⁹ Ibid

This poem indicates that *Yavanar* prayed to Allah. So they are the progeny of Muslim Arabs as deduced from **Palsanthamalai**.³⁰

PAYYANNUR PATTU:

Malayalam Grammar published in 1868 and Malayalam English Dictionary published in 1872 by Gundert are of immense importance for Kerala.³¹ **Payyanur Pattola** a collection of old poems in Malayalam and the songs are known as **Payyannur Pattu**. The songs are very popular among the local people of Kerala.

³⁰ This book of poems is lost in course of time. Some verses from this are quoted by the prosaic writer of *Kalaviyar Karigai*, a literary work in Tamil. According to S. Vaiyapuripillai, the **Palsanthamalai** is an eighth century Eulogy on a Caliph from *Vahudhapuri* in *Vachira Nadu* and the ruler was a descendant of Anjuvannam. *Vahudhapuri* denotes the present day Kayalpattinam and *Anthupar* is yet another name for *Vahudhapuri*.

³¹ **German News**, English Magazine, Nov,2004.

“Payyannur Pattu” in Malayalam is considered to be written in the 15th century. The author is unknown. It was collected by Hermann Gundert³² during his stay in Tellicherry.

³² **Gundert**, grandfather of the German poet Hermann Hesse, influenced education in Kerala as he wrote a grammar and a dictionary for the Malayalam language. In Kerala literally each child knows him. He was born on February 4, 1814 in Stuttgart in Germany. Gundert studied philosophy and protestant theology in Tubingen where he did his doctorate as philologist. In 1836 he came as a private tutor via England to south India, where he learnt the South Indian languages and studied especially their linguistic aspects. Gundert got to know also the missionary work and joined in 1838 the Basle mission for which he thereafter worked in South India. During the 23 years, which he spent mainly in Kerala, he dedicated his efforts besides his missionary work especially to the study of the local language Malayalam. In 1857 he was appointed school inspector of Kanara and Malabar by the British Colonial administration. Health reasons forced Gundert to return to Germany in 1859, where he started to work for the Calw Publishing House, which he headed until his death on April 25, 1903. In Calw Dr. Gundert published and also wrote several works in different languages. *Kanakku Saram*, a treatise written in good Malayalam with less than the usual infusion of Sanskrit was quoted by Dr. Gundert in his Malayalam Dictionary. It consists of six books or chapters. The first book treats of *fraction*, literally ‘what is below one’. The second book is about *decimals*, ‘what is above one’. The third book is about *Idangali*, the measures of capacity. The fifth one is about Kalanju, the weights and the sixth one deals with *kalam*, time.

Payyannur Pattu in Malayalam was translated by Gundert.
 The 92nd stanza of Payyannur Pattu quoted from the book³³ in
 Malayalam reads.....

Povaan Bilakkithe Nethireyum
Pokkozhippanaruthinhoothathippol
Chaavalareppole neeyalapovum
Changalham benam perikayippol
Kovathalachetti Anjuvannam
Koottummanikkiramathar Makkel
Nammalal Naalu Nagerathilum
Nalerakkolka Kutkkuchornnol.

³³. Antony.P., '**Payyannur Pattu - Paadavum Padanangalum**' (Payyannur Pattu, The Text and Studies), Kerala Padana Kendram, St. Berchman's College, Kottayam, Nov.2000, pp.28-29.

Note the first syllable rhyme completes the end rhyme of alternate lines. It is a typical stanza construction consisting of eight lines and it characterises the song.

Gundert's translation of the above verses quoted from the old Malayalam Song in Payyanur Pattu reads..

"Strong guards ... are now required (to) take the children of Govatala Chetti, of Anjuvannam and of the Manigramam, who together with ourselves, are the four (classes of) colonists in the four towns."

According to Dr. K.N. Ezhuthachan the references to **Kovathala Chetti, Anjuvannam and Koottum Manigramathar** in the '*Payyanaur Pattu*' indicate the existence of three or four well known merchant tribes in the 15th century and their friendship or defensive retinue.³⁴

³⁴ Ezhuthachan.K.N, 'Anjuvannavum Manikkiramamum', in '**Theranthetutha Prabandangal**' (Selected essays II), Kerla Sahithya Academy, Thrissur, 1991.

Anjuvannamum punnaiithalaippathiyum

ulvaithu".³⁷

In this inscription occurs the name of **Anjuvnnam** along with glorified God.

The 10th century copper plate reads³⁸ ...

‘அறுநூற்றுவரும் அஞ்ச வண்ணமும் மணிக்கிராமமும்

இரட்சிக்கக்கடவர்’. பள்ளியையும் பூமியையும் உலகும் சந்திராதித்தரும்

உள்ள நாளெல்லாம் செலவு பத்திரத்தில் பட்ட வண்ணம் செய்து

கொள்ளக்கடவர். அஞ்ச வண்ணமும் மணிக்கிராமமும்’

-வரிகள் 21-25

“*Arunurruvarum Anjuvannamum Manigramamum*

Iratchikkakadavar. Palliyaiyum boomiyaiyum

Ulagum chandradhitharum ulla nalellam selavu

Pattirathil pattavannam seydhukollakkadavar;

Anjuvannamum Manigramum.”

³⁷ Travancore Archaeological Series, Vol, II, P. 67

³⁸ Ibid, Ln.21-25

The translation of the extract quoted above reads that the members of the community known as **Arunurruvar** (the six hundred), **Anjuvannam** and **Manigramam** were enjoined to do everything in their power for the good of the place of worship and its land as long as the earth, the sun and the moon endure. **Anjuvannam** and **Manigramam** had to make entries in the document for expenditure.

‘அன்றன்றுபடும் உல்கு அஞ்சுவண்ணமும் மணிக்கிராமும் இலக்கிச்

சுவைப்பதாகவும்,

- Ibid, வரிகள் 34-35

“*Anranrupadum ulgu Anjuvannamum Manigramum*

ilakki chuvaippadagum”.³⁹

The customs (*Ulg*) collected day after day should be taken care of by the members of **Anjuvannam** and **Manigramam**. *Ilakki chuvaippadagum* means that the marking the quality, weight and the name of the owner and consume it.

அஞ்சுவண்ணமும் மணிக்கிராமமும் இவைகளுக்கு

அன்னியாயமுண்டாயில் உல்கு துலாக்கூலி தடுத்தும் தங்கள்

அன்னியாயம் தீர்த்துக்கொள்ளக் கடவர்’

(Ibid, வரிகள் 45-46)

³⁹ Ibid, Lns. 34-35

*"Anjuvannamum Manigramum ivaigalukku
anniyayamundayil **ulgu thulakooli** thaduthum
thangal anniyayam theerthukkollakadavar".⁴⁰*

If any injustice be done to Anjuvannam and Manigramam, they withhold the tribute and remedy themselves the injury done to them. **Ulgu** in Tamil stands for customs duty and **thulakooli** for weightment charges. Gundert has translated this inscription differently as given below.

"Should they themselves commit a crime, they are themselves to have the investigation of it."

This translation of Gundert does not convey the correct meaning. So the first translation is more appropriate and precise.

From the concurrent occurrence of the two merchant guilds namely **Anjuvannam** and **Manigramam** in the copper plates, it is understood that **Anjuvannam** and **Manigramam** were birds of same feather and they always flocked together. Here again in the following inscription of the copper plates the names are present side by side.

⁴⁰ Ibid, Lns. 45-46

‘இந்நகரத்துக்குக் காராளராக நீரேற்றார் அஞ்சுவண்ணமும்
மணிக்கிராமமும்- இவருள்

இரண்டு தலையாருங்கூடிச் செய்வதே கருமமாகவும்’

-Ibid, வரிகள் 48-49

Innagarathuk karalaraga neeretrar

Anjuvannamum Manigramum ivarul irandu

Thalaiyarungoodi seyvadey karumamagavum”.⁴¹

As custodians of the town, having the responsibility for irrigation, the **Anjuvannam** and **Manigramam**, the two merchant groups assemble and whatever they do is good for the people.

In the 10th Century copper plate inscriptions of Cochin the following lines are in Tamil.

‘ ஈசுப்பு இராப்பனுக்கு அஞ்சுவண்ணமும்... அஞ்சுவண்ணப்பேறும்....

கொடுத்தோம்’ (Epigraphia Indica Vol.III., page. 68.)

“*Yeesuppu Irappanukku Anjuvannamum*

Anjuvannapperum Koduthome.”⁴²

⁴¹ Ibid, Lns.48-49

⁴² EI, Vol. III, p.68

It means that we gave Anjuvannam and the right of Anjuvannam to *Yeesuppu Irappan*. We find here the grant of trading right to the **Anjuvannam** of *Kodungalur*.

Meera Abraham tried to convert *Issuppu Irappan* into Joseph Rabban and half-heartedly concluded that he was a Jew. It is a clear case of mistaken identity as she herself has admitted in the same paragraph in her Book that 'All other references to the Anjuvannam Merchants elsewhere in India indicate that they were Arab Muslim Traders'.⁴³

Internal evidence of their goodness is mentioned here in the following inscription. Bonds and links of brotherhood were established between them. Whatever arrangement these bodies of traders do shall probably be considered prosperous as the last line of this inscription reads that they assemble in front of the temple in full strength.

⁴³ Meera Abraham, **Two Medieval Merchant Guilds of South India**, 1988, p.36

‘இவ்வூரில் இருக்கிற அஞ்சுவண்ணமும் மணிக்கிராமத்தோமும்
ஆரியரில் சாமந்த பண்ட சாலையும்...பட்டாரியரும் தோயாவத்திரச்
செட்டிகளும் தென்னிலங்கை வளஞ்சியமும் கைக்கோளரும் தூசுவரும்
வாணியரும் நீண்ட கரையாருங்கூடி... கோயில் திருமுன்பிலே நிறைவுறக்
கூடியிருந்து’ (Ins.598 of 1926. தீத்தாண்டதானபுரக் கல்வெட்டு.)

*‘Ivvuril irukkira Anjuvannamum Manigramatharum,
Aariyaril Samantha pandasalaiyum.. Pattariyarum, Thoyavathira
chettigalum, Thennilangai valanjiyarum. Kaikolarum,
Thoosuvarum, Vaniyarum, Neendakaraiyarum koodi..Koil thiru
munbiley niraivurakkoodi irundu’...⁴⁴*

*Anjuvannam, Manigramam, Samantha Pandasalai,
Pattariyar, Thoyavathira chetti, Thennilangai Valanjiyar, Kaikolar
(weavers), Thoosuvar (cloth merchanats), Vaniyar (oil merchants),
and Neenda Karaiyum (fisher men) assemble with pleasure in front
of the Temple in full strength. It is clear from this inscription that
the guild of Anjuvannam had their involvement in the
administrative wings of the Temple.*

⁴⁴ . Theerthandathanapuram inscription, 598 of 1926

The causes for the bonds that brought their flocks together are leaders, locality, and trade in the kind of goods, and the collective actions in professional and social matters.

It is noticed in particular that the inscriptions at **Theerthandathanapuram** and the Copper plates of Kottayam and Cochin invariably include *Anjuvannam* and *Manigramam* concurrently. *Anjuvannam* precedes the other groups. So it is a clear indication that *Anjuvannam* commands better respect over the other group.

Cochi and **Kottayam** copper plates, stone inscriptions in Tamil country, old Songs like *Perungathai* and *Palsanthamalai*, in Tamil and songs like *Payyanoor Pattu* in Malayam provide clear proof for the Muslim identity of **Anjuvannaathu Viyaparigal** in the medieval period.

CHAPTER-IV

MANIGRAMAM

In southern India a series of merchant guilds developed powerful networks that included not only manufacturers but also private armies. These guilds received a good deal of local political encouragement. The power was evenly balanced between three or more medium-sized regional organizations with different linguistic characters. Tamil was on the southeast (Coromandel or **Cholamandala**) coast; Malayalam along the southwest (Malabar) coast; Telegu on the eastern (Andhra) coast north of the Tamil heartland; and Kanarese on the western (now Konkan) coast to the north of the Malabar region. Many of these regions depended upon overseas trade to increase their limited agricultural income and for economic development. The Pallavas were the first Tamil rulers to grow in power from the mid-sixth to the mid-eighth centuries. Their contacts with Southeast Asia are reflected in many of the early Hindu remains of the maritime region. Pallava power began to decline in the later eighth century, and by the later ninth century

the Cholas had replaced them as the leading power in the southeast.

The Cholas expanded their links with Merchant Guilds.

These merchant associations controlled much of southern India's sea trade during the late first and early second millennia. During the eighth and ninth centuries much of southwest India's trade had been directed towards the west. A number of Muslim, Jewish, Zoroastrian and Christian merchant groups from western Asia and the Middle East had established trading marts on the Malabar Coast. It was in this context that at least some of the early Indian merchant associations began to emerge.

The **Manigramam** was one of the earliest of the south Indian merchant guilds to appear in local records. This was mentioned in the late ninth century Kottayam (Sthanu Ravi) copper plate inscriptions found near Quilon on the Malabar Coast. This record is a contract between the local authority and a group of residents allowing them access to the port market. The Pallava rulers of the southeast had maintained close relations with the Chera state of the Malabar Coast. The merchants of Manigramam extended their influence to the east coast probably with political

encouragement. A 10th century inscription found in Valikandesvara temple, Valikandapuram, Perambalcre Taluk Tiruchirappalli District mentions *valangai*, *Ainurruvar* and *Manigramam*. It talks about gold given by these merchant guilds to this temple.¹

Gundert's translation from Cheran Sthanu Ravi copper plates in Kottayam reads.. .

"No personal tax to be received for the slaves they buy; for admitting any conveyances or letting them out they are to receive 8 coins; in the case of (female) elephants and of boats, whether for letting in or letting out they are to receive four coins; merchandize belonging to the citizens to be disposed of (or removed) by them with the cognizance of the above and that they (the palliyar) do all the business (rights and duties) of a

¹ ARE 308 of 1964-65

Lord(Swami), on the place of packing the
wares (or on ports where poles with
leaves are set up as signs of
prohibition)and elsewhere, only after
deliberation with the above mentioned
(**Anjuvannam** and **Manigramam**). If any
injustice be done to these, they may
withhold the tribute and remedy
themselves the injury done to them.
Should they themselves commit a crime,
they are themselves to have the
investigation of it."²

அஞ்சுவண்ணமும் மணிக்கிராமமும் இவைகளுக்கு
அன்னியாயமுண்டாயில் உல்கு துலாக்கூலி தடுத்தும் தங்கள்
அன்னியாயம் தீர்த்துக்கொள்ளக் கடவர்' (TAS,Vol.II,p.67)

From this copper plate inscription in Tamil it is found that
the guilds of **Anjuvannnam** and **Manigramam** were supporting
each other and resolved their disputes amicably.

² Appadurai.A. **Economic Conditions in Southern India 1000-1500 A.D.**
Vol. I, p.402, and TAS, Vol. II, p.67

The concurrent occurrence of these two guilds of merchants in the Theerthandathanapuram inscription near Thiruvadanai, and in the copper plates of Kottayam and Cochin assumes importance as they have played a dominant role in the Tamil Country. **Manigramam**, a very popular merchant guild of the medieval period was associated with **Anjuvannam** in their trading activities around the Tamil country. They had their base at **Kodumbalur** in Pudukkottai District. The Manigramam of Kodumbalur had its name mentioned in the temple inscription at Koilpatti near Kulithalai.³ The 11th and 12th century inscriptions also contained references to **Manigramam** of Kodumbalur⁴. **Manigramam** continued to be a counterpart of **Anjuvannam** in all respects.

These merchant guilds assumed the role of major patrons and supporters of religious establishments. They were drawn into the collection of certain tolls and taxes on behalf of the State.⁵

³ ARE 283 of 1964-65

⁴ SII, IV, 147; ARE 288 of 1964-65

⁵ Indrapala, "Some Medieval Mercantile Communities", Journal of Tamil Studies 2, 2 (1970), pp. 30-32.

Under Chola rule merchant guilds have dominated the internal and external trade of south India and parts of Sri Lanka from the late ninth century to the late thirteenth century.

The general Sanskrit term for such corporate trading communities was *vanigrama* ("community of merchants"). *Vanigrama* was taken as their title by a group of merchants mentioned in a tenth-century Sri Lankan inscription, and the term Manigramam was a local variant.⁶

The developments in the weaving and dyeing industries were the main cause for the trade boom, possibly by the eleventh century.⁷ Merchant Guilds gained a large degree of control over the non-agrarian economy in southern India.

The slow decline of the Chola state had already begun before the end of the twelfth century. During the thirteenth century, this decline accelerated into a collapse. Pandians in the far south, the Hoysalas in Karnataka, and local chiefs in northern Tamil Nadu

⁶ Abraham, **Two Medieval Merchant Guilds of South India**, 1988, p. 135.

⁷ Ibid, pp.117, 162-66.

carved up the Chola territory. The Chola state was at war with its neighbours. But it was still an active exporter of cotton textiles.

In the mid-thirteenth century, the Kakatiya ruler of Warangal in Andhra, Ganapati revived trade in the southeast Indian port of Motupalli by promising greater safety and stability to the guild of merchants.⁸ Mottupalli Edict of A.D.1244 issued by the Kakatiya monarch invites overseas merchants. He decreed that he was willing to return the cargo of vessels shipwrecked on his shore, whereas the previous monarchs had appropriated the entire cargo. But he expected the fixed duties to be paid. It shows that he was wise and considerate and did not run riot. This was decreed for the benefit of traders who were in distress. No edict is issued deliberately to cause harm to the merchant's reputation or injure them in any way.

It is observed that by the fourteenth century the great merchant associations were issuing fewer inscriptions and their economic and political powers were declining in South India.

⁸ K.A. Nilakanta Sastri, "**Foreign trade under the Kakatiyas**", Journal of Oriental Research, 8 (1934): 319.

MANIGRAMAM ABROAD:

Exchange of essentials on barter basis was common in the villages of the Tamil country. The paddy is distributed even now as 'coolī' (wages). It is believed that the trade in *Tamilagam* began in Neydal. The traders were called *Vanigachattukkal* in *Agananuru*. Kovalan in *Silappathigaram*, the Tamil Epic, was an affluent merchant in his early days. A few of the poets of the **Sangam** age belonged to the class of merchants.

Madurai Aruvai Vanigan Ilavettanar

Madurai Kulavanigan Sittalai Sattanar

Kaverippumpattinattu Ponvanigarar Makanar Nappudanar

Beri Sattanar, Uraiyur Ilampon Vaniganar and

Madurai Olaikkadaik Kannam Pukundarayttanar

were some of the Poets belonging to the merchant community of the Sangam age.⁹

⁹ K.K. Pillay, A **Social History of the Tamils**, Madras University Historical Series, No.25, Vol. I, 1975.

It is also observed that the Tamilians had their own vessels for transportation of merchandise during the ancient period. The references to small vessels like **Pari**, **Odam**, **Ambi** and **Timil** are found in the Tamil Classics.

Pari and **Timil** appear in *Pattinappalai*. **Odam** is mentioned in *Agananuru*. **Ambi** occurs in *Ainkurunuru*, *Narrinai* and *Kalittogai*.

These references to the vessels indicate that the transportation of commodities took place not only through backwaters and coastal waterways but also beyond the seas. It deserves mention here that the Tamilians were able to establish cultural influence in South East Asia mainly because of their commercial hegemony.

Drawida refers to the east coast Dravidian region of Tamil country, where the Cholas had overthrown the Pallavas late in the ninth century. The Cholas extended their influence into Sri Lanka, the Maldives and Laccadives by the first decade of the eleventh century.

The Dravidians who were identified with *Dramilas* (Tamils) were also known as *Thirayar*-the men who rode the waves, the race which in the very dawn of History carried its trade and culture across the waves to the west and to the harbingers of civilization.

They were able to declare through the lips of their incomparable poets that they were the seafaring community even during the sangam age. Kaniyan Poongunranar in **Purananuru**, a Sangam literature declares...

யாதுமுரே யாவருங் கேளீர்

“Yadhum oorey Yavarum Keyleer”

It speaks of the universal approval and broad vision of Tamilians. Further it is understood from this verse that the one world idea, new to the modern world, was already old to the Tamils of the Sangam age.

Avvaiyar in *Konrai Vendan* sang

திரை கடலோடியுந் திரவியந்தேடு

“Thirai Kadal odiym thiraviyam thedu”

Ocean rovers, the dauntless **Thirayars**, travelled through the oceans to earn their livelihood and wealth. When North Indian culture discouraged overseas trade and considered it as a sin to cross the ocean even for commercial activities, Tamils not only encouraged but also established their commercial contacts abroad.

In an old Tamil poem of the medieval period, the writer mentions 17 countries where the Tamil language and consequently the Tamil culture were known.

சிங்களஞ் சோனகஞ் சாவகஞ் சீனந்துளுக்குடகங்
கொங்கணங் கன்னடங் கொல்லந் தெலுங்கம் வங்கங்
கங்கமதங் கடாரங் கவடங் கடுங்குசலங்
தங்கும் புகழ் தமிழ் குழ் பதினேழ் புவி தாமிவையே

Among the seventeen countries referred to are Ceylon, Java, Malaya, Cambodia and China. The word **Sonaham** should be taken to include Arabia and neighbouring countries.

The early Sangam works contain references to the voyages of the people of Kerala to foreign countries. In **Patitrupathu** of 6th

century AD, the poetess **Kakkai Patiniyar** refers to the Chera ships plying the ocean to procure wealth from foreign countries. Kerala was, in fact, in the forefront of the overseas commerce of South India. **Paranar**, another great poet of the Sangam Age, refers to the huge ships of a chieftain by name **Veliyan** going abroad to fetch gold. Another poet alludes to the unchallenged supremacy of the ships of the Chera in the western seas when the ships of other powers could not even think of peeping into those waters. In the later period, that is, from the 9th to the 13th centuries, trade organisations like **Anjuvannam**, **Nanadesikal**, and **Manigramam** engaged themselves in foreign trade. Though the foreign nationalities played the predominant role in the commerce of Kerala, the part played by the natives is by no means negligible.

The guilds of merchants are corporate entities and they maintained no gold reserve as assets. The individual merchants engaged in foreign trade possessed gold coins. '**Chinakannakam**' came into Nagapattinam at the time of Rajendra Chola.¹⁰ The gold coins must have been current in the markets of Tamilagam at the

¹⁰ ARE 166 OF 1956-57

time of Chera, Chola and Pandiya Rulers, the three crowned kings of Tamilagam. The payments for international exchanges were made in kind or in gold, silver, copper and iron. The impression gained is that the rates of barter fluctuated with supply and demand. At the end of 13th century the export of metals from China was restricted. For many of its export the Indian subcontinent received gold, silver and copper as payments. Those were the currency of the society. Anyhow perforated copper coins were found on Coromandel Beaches. Tangible evidence for the trading activities of the medieval age is scanty. But the coin of a particular age has tangible evidence. Every cluster of clouds has a silver line.

Along the Coromandel Coast a class of thin copper die-struck coins was found in considerable numbers in or near dunes and sands in the vicinity of the **kupams**, or fishing hamlets that stud the shore. Roman oboli, perforated Chinese coins, bits of lead, beads, fragments of charcoal, etc. were also discovered in dunes of the silver beaches of peninsular India. These articles collected by the wives and children of fishermen after gales of wind or heavy

rains were purchased from them by the itinerant pedlars, called **Labbais** and **Marakayars**, in exchange for useful necessities. They were sold to braziers and coppersmiths. The discovery of articles of this description in such localities indicates the existence of a considerable maritime trade in former times, probably during the first four or five centuries of the Christian era.¹¹ The mariners and traders frequenting these places might have dropped these coins.

The merchants of Medieval India used stamped coins. Grains of rice in the husk, being the staple cereal of the people was taken to be the measuring unit of gold. The small pieces, weighing from 5 to 6 grains represented the tenth part of the **Kalanju**. A weight of 50 grains was identified with one **Kalanju**. This was specially employed by goldsmiths and jewelers. A gold coin weighing about 52.3 grains having an Elephant on obverse and floral design on the reverse is attributed to **Cheras**. The figure on the seal of the Kongu

¹¹ Walter Elliot, **Numismata Orientalia, Coins of Southern India**, Delhi, 1975, p.35

copper plates is exactly similar to this.¹² The weight of this coin is more or less equal to one **Kalanju**.

In the beginning One **Kalanju** was equal to 20 **manjadis**. As business activities increased its place was replaced by copper **pana**. The **kalanju**, the unit for assessing the measure of gold is mentioned in the present day matrimonial transactions in the district of Tirunelveli. **Manjadi** is now relegated to the exclusive use of the diamond merchants. The small weighing stone of one **manjadi**, made of brass in the shape of octahedron, which is also the form of the primitive crystal of the diamond, is equal to 4.8 grains. A **kalanju** of 10 **manjadis** has the normal weight of 48 grains. One **visam** manjadi weighs 0.3 grains. The fractional weights lost their significance in the rude transactions of the merchants. *Visam* being equal to (1/16) sixteenth of anything was the base for the '**Ana**' system of computation where 16 **Anas** made one '*rupee*' that prevailed in India before the metric system was introduced.

¹² Ibid, p. 152 F.

The smooth, grey, hard and nearly spherical seeds of the climbing species of *Caesalpinia* are known as *kalanju*. *Kalanju-kol* in Tamil is the scale for weighing with single pan and it is almost an equivalent of Roman steel yard for weighing. *Manjadi* is the seed of the *Adenanthera Pavonina*, a tree common in most parts of India. The seeds are of bright scarlet colour, hard, durable and uniform in size and weight. The metal equivalent of *manjadi* came in copper under the name of 'pana'.

Four seeds of *pachai payaru* (*Phaseolus radiatus*, L.), green grams were employed by goldsmiths of Tinnevely district to weigh one *kunri* or *mittu*. Two kunris were equal to one *manjadi* when 20 *manjadi* made one *kalanju*.

The smallest denomination of the copper currency was the *kasu*, a true Dravidian word common to the Tamil, Telugu, Canarese and Malayalam dialects. The word **kasu** had the general significance of money as there were **pon-kasu** (gold-coin), **velli-kasu** (silver-coin), and **sembu-kasu** (copper-coin). The copper

kasu appeared to exhibit an affinity to the **kalanju**. The word **Kalanju** still retains the hold on popular usage in the far southern districts of peninsular India. **Aanai-kasu** (elephant-coin) stamped with the figure of an elephant is attributed to Chera or Kongu dynasty.

South Indian merchant guilds began to extend their commercial and trading activities and influence abroad during the ninth century. The main overseas trade focuses of the Manigramam have been the South East Asia. The domestic and port trade activities of Manigramam spread during the tenth and eleventh centuries to the east coast regions of Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, southern Kalinga, and the Pondyan south, and across the Bay of Bengal.

TAMIL INSCRIPTIONS IN SOUTH EAST ASIA:

The term *banigrama* was the Javanised version of *vanigrama*. The Indians in Javanese ports had been drawn from the east coast districts of Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh and Southern Orissa. **Kalinga**, the east coast region of India had been an

important source of cotton textiles at an early date. The term "*Kling*" was widely adopted in the Indonesian archipelago as a blanket-term for all South Asians. It was perhaps because of the region's long association with Southeast Asia. *Kalingan* became *Kling* in Indonesia and Brunei. It clearly establishes that there were close commercial contacts between South India on the one hand and Java and Brunei on the other and that the South Indian merchant guilds like **Manigramam** played a conspicuous role both in exports and imports. South Indian trade with the South East had been dominated by exports. The musk began to gain more prominence in the list of exports. South Indian merchant associations exported both deer **musk** and **civet**.¹³ **Kasturi** was adopted into Malay and Javanese vocabularies as a term either for the musk of the musk deer (*Moschus moschiferus*, Linn.) or of the Malay **civet**.

Medieval South Indian interest in trade with Southeast Asia is reflected in several clusters of Tamil language inscriptions and

¹³ Abraham, **Two Medieval Merchant Guilds of South India**, pp. 161, 172.

south Indian religious remains that have been found on the eastern fringes of the Indian Ocean. These inscriptions, dating from the **mid-ninth** to late **thirteenth centuries**, were written on stone in **Tamil** language using Tamil script.

Takua-pa is a town situated north of the Perak district in Burma. It is a well-known harbour and an early trading centre visited by Tamil Traders from South India. A Tamil Inscription discovered in 1902 by Mr. Bourke, a mining Engineer of the Siamese government, has supported this. The earliest Tamil inscription was found on the hill *Khau Pra-Narai* (Brah Narayana), about ten miles upstream on the **Takuapa** River, on the west coast of peninsular Thailand. It was associated with the remains of a small structure and three large stone figures - Siva and two companions.¹⁴

Dr. Hultzsch has published a copy of the Tamil inscription dating back to the end of the 8th century found on a rock at Takuapa, Wat Namuang, in the Malay Peninsula. It shows that

¹⁴ S.J. O'Connor, Hindu Gods of Peninsular Siam, **Supplementum 'o Artibus Asiae** 28 (1972), figs. 28-31, cited by The Heritage Society, First Ismaili Electronic Library and Database.

there was a temple of Vishnu at that place. The members of **Manigramam**, a trading guild on the west coast and also of a body of men, probably Hindu colonists, and of bow-men 'men of the vanguard' were evidently soldiers of a force placed there for protection of trade.¹⁵

The **Takuapa** inscription was written entirely in Tamil language, in south Indian script of about the ninth century.¹⁶

... ரயர்மன் கு...
 (ம)ந ந தாந நங்குரடை
 ... ஓதாட்டகுளம் ஓபர் ஸீ அ...
 நாரணம் மணக்கிராமத்தார்...
 கும் சேன முகத்தூர்க்கும்
 ... முதார்த்தும் அடைக்கலம்

¹⁵ Robert Sewell, **The Historical Inscriptions of Southern India**, 1983, p.32 and p.36

¹⁶ E. Hultzsch, "Note on a Tamil Inscription in Siam", **Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society** (1913): 337-39; and "Supplementary Note on a Tamil Inscription in Siam", **Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society** (1914): 397-98.

The first line of this Tamil inscription is largely illegible, but contains the fragments of what appears to be a royal name *varman ku*. The word *varman* reminds one of the Pallava king, **Nandi Varman**.

The revised translation published by K.A. Nilakanta Sastri reads:¹⁷...

"The tank dug [by] Nangg [u] r- [u] dai [yan] [and] called Sri-A [vani]-Naranam [is placed under] the protection of the members of Manigramam, the residents of the military camp (senamuga [m]), and [...]"

It records the construction of a tank by one who describes himself as the Lord of Nangur. The tank is placed under the protection of the members of Manigramam, under the residents of the cantonment described as *Senamugam* and one other cantonment. The name of the other military cantonment is obscured by a gap in the inscription. **Nilakanta Sastri** suggested that the

¹⁷"Takuapa and its Tamil Inscription", **Journal of the Malayan Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society**, 22,2 (1949):29 .

digging of the tank occurred at the behest of the **Pallava** king **Nandivarman III**, who ruled at **Kanchipuram** in southeast India during the mid-ninth century. If this inscription does, indeed, date to the middle of the **ninth century**, then it is almost the **first** known **inscription** to mention the **Manigramam**.

The **Kottayam** inscription of **Quilon** on the Malabar Coast of India, issued in about 849 A.D, during the reign of ruler Sthanu Ravi mentions the **Manigramam** and it is discussed in the previous chapter.¹⁸ However, since the **Pallavas** were, by the **mid-ninth century**, already ceding their dominant position in southeast India to the **Cholas**, it may be worth comparing the **Takuapa** inscription with the slightly later Tamil language inscription from **Munasandal**, in the early Chola heartland, issued under the early Chola ruler **Parakesarivarman**. This inscription issued in about 870 A.D, records endowments made by the **Valanjiyar** (merchant).¹⁹ If the **Cholas** were supporting the **Ayyavole** merchant association from the Konkan coast at this time,

¹⁸ TAS, Vol. II, p. 67

¹⁹ Balasubrahmaniam, "The Tisai Ayirattainurruvar and Municandai Record", 1934, p. 618

they were also likely to have had connections with the nearer Malabar Coast and its **Manigramam** merchant association.

The remains of the tank of possible south Indian design found at the port site of **Ko Kho Khao**, not far from **Takuapa** formed part of the infrastructure of a settlement associated with **Manigramam**, a south Indian merchant group. It is deduced that this route linking the Bay of Bengal to the Gulf of **Siam** was in active use in the ninth century.

The earliest of the associations to have left a record was the **Manigramam**. It had been actively involved in transit trade bypassing the Malacca Straits. The inscription dated 1088 A.D. from **Lobo Tua** on the west coast of Sumatra, and the thirteenth century inscriptions from Pagan in Upper Burma are separated by perhaps a century and a half. They involve the **Nanadesi**, the major association which had also attached the **Manigramam** in some way by the tenth century.

Most of the thirteenth-century Tamil inscriptions abroad do not mention merchant associations. It perhaps reflects the sharp decline in the economic power of these associations within south India during the course of the thirteenth century.

VALANJIYAR AND MANIGRAMAM:

The **Srenis** or guilds in the early days were organizations of producers and later on they became guilds or companies of merchants. In medieval Deccan they had branches in many cities. The **Viravalanjigar**, translated as the *Company of Gentlemen Merchants* had members in every important city of the peninsular India.

The **Manigramam** functioned not only in Southern India, but also in Ceylon, where it hired its mercenaries to Sinhalese Kings. The **manigramam** of Kodumbalur endowing a charitable trust in Salem²⁰ and the **Valanjiyar** of Tiruppurambiyam²¹ are examples of autonomous merchant guilds and corporations of

²⁰ ARE 47 of 1888 cited by K.A.Nilakanta Sastri

²¹ ARE 71 of 1897

Medieval India. **Valanjiyar** of Tinnevely had the *Karanmai* of the lands of a local temple.²² About 1207 A.D. the merchant communities of Nellur, Narayanapuram, Nedumpirai, Arkadu, Mayilappur, Tiruvorriyur, Pundamalli Nedumpirai, Damanakacceri, Perungalur and Tiruniru co-operated together in acquiring a whole village and giving it as devadana to the temple of Tiruppasur, for constructing a '*madil*', an enclosing wall.²³

NAGARATHAR AND MANIGRAMAM:

Kol nirai cooli and kalavuk cooli were given to meet the expenses of Ulagalantha Perumal koil at Kanchipuram. **Manigramalvan** was a member in the village sabha. The **Nagarathar** had the right to administer the Temple affairs. The legal right to appoint the janitor and the clerk and to exempt the Temple from paying any tax was endowed with the **Nagarathar**.

²² ARE 28 of 1927

²³ ARE 120 of 1930

The various accounts of the temple were audited by the **Nagarathar** and a group of Auditors.²⁴

வேதம் வல்லான் ஒரு பிராமணனை உத்தமாக(?) து
ஊட்டுவிதாக உரையூர் மணிகிராமத்து நா...

Vedam vallan oru Brahmananai uthamaha (?) thu ootuvindhaha
*Uraiur Manigramathu na...*²⁵

This inscription refers to an endowment of money by a member of the **Manigramam** of *Uraiur* for feeding a Brahmin versed in the Vedas.

An inscription regarding a sale of land as a tax free *devadana* by members of the *Mulaparishad* of *Mahendramangalam* to a temple includes the following name as signatory,

சோழ நாட்டு இர(ாஜ சை) னி புரத்து மணிகிராமத்து
கொற்றமங்கலமுடையான் சேகரன் சாத்தனை

²⁴ Jagadisa Iyer, P. V., **South Indian Shrines**, Asian Educational Sereis, New Delhi, 1982, p.89

²⁵ ARE 519 of 1905, No.28 (p.11).

chozha nattu raja sainipurathu Manigramathu

*kotramangalamudaiyan segaran sathanai.*²⁶

Meera Abraham has thrown light on the social groups from which the traders of Manigramam were drawn. She points out that the Manigramam was associated with an elite ruling urban group at Quilon during the ninth and tenth centuries, according to Sthanu Ravi plates. The service castes in the trading colony at Quilon, the Ilavar, the washermen, the carpenters, even the cultivating Vellalas mentioned in the inscription had been of lower social status than the members of Maigramam and Anjuvannam. According to the Talakkad inscriptions of the eleventh century, the members of Manigramam were first shopkeepers, owners of booths in a market place and also itinerant traders. The thirteenth century Tamil language inscriptions of the east coast described the members of Manigramam as traders, transporters and merchants along major trade highways. But they remained subordinate to their patrons, the **Ayyavole** merchants. Therefore, it is obvious that the members of Manigramam belong to different disparate social groups and they

²⁶ SII, Vol. XIII, **Cholas** Ins. No.26

had the right to claim themselves as the members of this guild of merchants. It is substantiated by the fact that the members of Manigramam in Kerala were **Hindus** but later had been identified as **Nayars**. Therefore the social status of these traders was in a state of flux and social mobility was possible and permissible.

Manigramam thus was a corporation of merchants like the **Ayyavole** whose trading activities extended over a wide area with centres at various places not only in South India but also abroad. It is to be observed here that the activities of this organization covered the period from ninth century to the middle of the 14th century and that the membership of the guild was open to all merchants irrespective of their relationship and social status. It was a powerful Hindu trade guild of the medieval period. However on the west coast it is possible that the guild of Manigramam had Christian merchants as its members along with many other Hindu traders.

CHAPTER –V

AINNURRUVAR

Nanadesi are itinerant traders like the pigeons. There were a large number of dominant trading groups and their numerous progeny multiplied into tiny groups like *birundas*, *chettiyars*, *eriviras*, *hanjamana*, *mummuridanda*, *munaiviras*, *nagarathar*, *nattukottai-chettiyars*, *setti*, *settiguttas*, *settiputras*, *sirupuli*, *valangai*, *valathukai*, *valagaiyar*, *idangai* etc. They are numbered around 46 trading in different nomenclature. Actually they were the islands of integrity. They should have increased exponentially. *Yeru-sattu* and *irangu-sattu* are also to be added to the list of merchant groups. The guilds of merchants were intended to keep their flock together and to penalize the bad eggs.

Nanadesi means many countries while **Thisai Ayiram** in Tamil gives the meaning as thousand directions. The name and style of a merchant group that appeared in an inscription as ‘**Nanadesi-tisai-ayirattu ainnurruvar**’¹ is translated by K.A. Neelakanta Sastri as ‘Five

¹ ARE 601 of 1902.

hundred (**Ainnurruvar**) of the thousand directions in all countries.’²

There is reference to **Thisai Ayirathu Ainnurruvar** of *Eru-sattu* and *Irangu-sattu* in Piranmalai Inscriptions. According to K.V. Subramaniya Iyer they were the supervisors of the export and import activities and were settled in the coastal towns.

Narthamalai is a village in Pudukottai District. **Nagaratharmalai** was the old name. The temple in this village was built by Pallava Kings. This place with **Samanar Kundu** is a very small village with a new name Chettipatti. An **ainnuruvapperumpalli** was there. Merchant guilds such as **Thisai Ayirathu Ainnurruvar** and **Ainnurruvar** lived in this area in the Pallava period. They had mercantile activities across the ocean. The present day **Marrurkoil Nagarathar** has **Ainnurreesar** as their deity. **Ainnurru Esuvarar** temple is in Marrur.³

² Neelakanta Sastri, K.A., **The Colas**, 1955,p.595

³ Somaley, **Chettinadum Senthamizhum**, (Tamil)1999,p.47-48

The **Nanadesis** are sometimes equated with **Ainnurruvar**. While **Nanadesi** is supposed to be a more general term to signify the itinerant traders, **Thisai Ayirathu Ainnurruvar** is a specific term to denote a guild of merchants with separate entity. The scholars have their own doubt about a separate entity for **Nanadesi** as a guild of merchants. But there is sufficient evidence to prove that **Nanadesis** were distinct entities. Since there exists records of land sales between **Nanadesi** and **Ainnurruvar** which would have hardly taken place if they had not been separate organizations.⁴

The traders of many countries were known by the functional term **Nanadesi**. They were itinerant traders. The early South Indian trade organizations have usually been identified by the term '**Vira valanjiyar**' which means valiant merchants and they were called '**vira banajus**' in kannada.⁵ There was traffic and trade by mutual good will. Among them were some that hankered after money. But still they were the source of strength for their community.

⁴ Neelakanta Sastri, *opt. cit.*, p.596.

⁵ Mahalingam, T.V., **Economic Life in the Vijayanagar Empire**, Madras, 1951, p.31

TISAIYAYIRATTAINNURUVA NANADESI:

The composition of the Ainnurruvar organisation is not clear. It was the core of the trading groups. The members of this organization identified themselves as **Thisai Airathuainurruvar** .

The apparent link between the operations of the merchant guilds like **Nanadesi** and **Ainnurruvar** is of considerable interest. The involvement of the south Indian Merchant guilds in the transit trade across the region was high. The trade moved in all directions through all countries as the guilds came to be known as **Thisaiyirattu Aainnurruvar** and **Thisaiyarattu Ainnurruva Nanadesi**. A good number of eleventh century inscriptions give tangible evidence for the real nomenclatures of the most active guilds of merchants in Medieval South India.

Tisaiyayirattainnuruva Nanadesa, "The Five Hundred of the Thousand Directions in All Countries" is one of the branches of the Ainnurruvar merchant association. A number of inscriptions of the eleventh century in south India and Sri Lanka mention the Ainnurruvar merchant association, and a few mention the *Tisaiyayirattainnuruva*

Nanadesa group. Eleventh century script in Tamil engraved in a loose stone, kept in Kalaimagal Kalvi Nilayam, Erode, refers to **Tisaiyayirattainnuruva nanadesi**.⁶ Another 11th century script in Tamil found near a village tank, Kandagala, Gundlupet taluk, Mysore District mentions *virananadesi*.⁷

An inscription of A.D.1235 from Anbil mentions an assemblage of the *cittira-melipperiya nattar*, the *tisai-ayirattu ainnurruvar*, the *Settis* of the *nadus* in many *mandals*, *davaccettis*, *Jayapalas*, *munai-vira-kodiyar*, the excellent *silpis*, and the *mudar-padai-kalanaiyar*. The assembly described themselves by the phrase *Rajarajapperu-niraviyam*. The object of the meeting is unfortunately not clear for the inscription is damaged.⁸ *Valanjiyar* and *nanadesiyat-tisai-ayirattainnurruvar* built a part of the temple at *Tiruvilakkudi*.⁹

During the time of Rajendra Chola, the Pandya country was annexed to the Chola Empire. The Pandyas were expelled and made into *persona non grata* without any recognition and simply made into non-entities. Their identity was made non-existent. A new dynasty was

⁶ ARE 215 of 1976-77. Cited Meera by Abraham.

⁷ EC, III (NEW), Gundlupet 154. Cited by Meera Abraham.

⁸ ARE 601 of 1902

⁹ ARE 131 of 1926

formed. The sons of Rajendra Chola were conferred the title of Chola-Pandya and ruled as the kings in the Pandya country. They went by names like '*Sundara Chola Pandya*', etc.

Every town, village were renamed after the Cholas. Even irrigation tanks and canals were thus renamed. The Pandya country was renamed '*Rajaraja Pandya Nadu*'. Countries were divided into provinces called '*valanadu*'s. These were subdivided into '*nadu*'s and '*kurraim*'s. The next sub-subdivision was '*Ur*' and '*Gramam*'. The province of '*Kerala Singga Vala Nadu*' became '*Rajendra Chola Vala Nadu*'. '*Niruba Sekara Chadurveda Manggalam*' became '*Chola Marthanda Chatur Veda Manggalam*'. One canal was renamed as '*Karikal Chola Vayykal*'. And an irrigation tank came to be called '*Sri Kundhavai Pereri*'. This process is known as '*Cholianisation*'. There was a colony of merchants called '*Thisai Ayirathu Ainurruvar*'. They had a chief town called '*Aruviyur*'. The merchants of '*Aruviyur*' were liberal patrons for this temple.

AINNURRUVAR:

Shikarpur Inscription¹⁰ records a grant to a temple. It has a long introduction giving the following facts:

The traders are famed as the 500 heroes born to wander over the world to such places as Chera, Chola and Pondya, Malaya, Magadha, Kausalya (North East India), Saurashtra, Gauda(Bengal) and Parasa (Persia).

They trade in elephants, horses, sapphires, moonstones, pearls, rubies, diamonds, oruja, topaz, emerald, corals, cardamom and cloves, sandalwood, camphor and musk. Through the payment of customs they fill the ruler's treasury with gold and jewels and provide him with weapons. They confer gifts upon learned Hindu teachers and upon Hindu deities.

The '**500 heroes**' mentioned in this inscription refer to **Ainnurruvar** having the trading network over an area of ample radius to carry on business in different goods of luxury.

¹⁰ Shikarpur Inscription No.118, **Mysore Archaeological Series**, Epigraphia Carnatica, ed. B. Lewis Rice, Bangalore 1886-1909, vol.7.

EZH THISAI AYIRATHAR:

The edges of a stone grinder with 98cm x 75cm dimension found in Kanai near Villupuram in Tamil Nadu have the following lines engraved in Tamil *Vattazhuthu*

“ ...யக நன்றெடு (செய்) நடுவேய்
ஏழ்திசையாயி (ரத்தா)ர்
கனயம் கல் பெருஞ் செ(க்கு)”

“*Yagananru (sey) naduvey Yezh thisai ayirathar*

Kanayam kalperunche (kku)”.¹¹

The last and the first part of the inscription are found erased due to time and friction. The occurrence of the name of a guild of merchants as ‘*Ezh thisai ayirathar*’ is slightly different from the usual ‘*Thisai Ayirathar*’ with a prefix *Ezh* in this inscription. This is probably the progeny of ‘*Thisai Ayirathu Ainnurruvar*. It is believed that ‘*Ezhu Panai Nadu*’ transformed itself into ‘*Yazh panam*’. So it is construed that the ‘**thisai ayirathar**’ mentioned here with a prefix *Ezh* belonged to

¹¹ **Dhinamani**, The Tamil daily, Chennai , March 19, 2003.

Yazhpanam. The word *Kanayam* refers possibly to Kanai, the find spot of the inscription.

Grinders with Tamil *Vattezhuthu* were so far found only in **Karungalakkudi** in Madurai District. It attracts our attention as the grinder found at Kanai in Villupuram District has the 9th century *vattezhuthu* engravings. The prominence of *vattezhuthu* was continuously felt only in Pondy Nadu and Chera Nadu. In contrast to this fact, it is found here that the people of **Thondai Nadu** were also familiar with *vattezhuthu* till the end of 9th century.

VAYARILAM KALAIYAR:

Scholars of the Dr.M.Rajamanikkanar centre for Historical research, Trichy, have copied eight ancient inscriptions from Adiyarkku Eliyar Kovil at Ambukkovil near Gandharvakottai in Pudukkottai district.¹²

¹² **The Hindu**, June 27, 2004.

The village is referred to as “*Azhimbi*” and the temple is called “*Virarajendra Cholisvaram*” in the inscriptions. The inscriptions were found carved on the basement of the *gopuram*, pillars, doorframes and walls of the *mandapam* in front of the main *vimana* of the temple. An inscription copied from the door frame of the *ardha mandapam* records the name of its donor as *Koothan Udappalagiyar*, while another 14th century inscription records details of a land gifted to the temple.

Another inscription copied from the pillars of the *mukha mandapam* of the 14th century main shrine, throws light on several land related tax terms such as “*kadamai*,” “*antharayam*,” “*chandivikraga peru*,” “*Vasal viniyogum*,” and “*karthigaippachai*.” Yet another inscription of the same period also refers to the gift of a piece of land to the temple. Labourers who ploughed the land agreed to give 30 *kalams* of paddy to the temple.

One more inscription copied from the basement of the *gopuram* brings to light the gift of gold made jointly by the *sthanathar* (administrator) of the temple and the *Vayarilam Kalaiyar*, a mercantile

group of the village for the renovation of the temple. Thirty '*kalanju*' (a measure) of gold was collected from the merchants of the common market and 10 '*kalanju*' was given by the *Sudhra Sthanathar* of the temple for carrying out the renovation.

A 17th century inscription reveals an agreement reached between *Andan Pandri Kannan*, headman of the temple palanquin-bearers and the authorities on temple services and renovation. The temple authorities and local merchants had also agreed to collect three "*kasus*" from each merchant for renovation. Another 1655 AD inscription, records an accord between the *sthanathar*, the *Chetti* merchant community and the *Nattar* to contribute 50 *kalanju* of gold to the *Elunattu Mutt* at Chidambaram.

The inscriptions reveal the absence of royal control over *Ambukkovil* for nearly three centuries and also indicate that several mercantile groups lived in the village during this period, enjoying various positions in local governing bodies.

VELAPURAM:

Velapuram, this term, which means "the settlement on the seashore", also appears in the eulogy to *ainnurruvar* in several inscriptions in South India. These eulogies generally state that the merchant group was involved in commerce in 18 *pattinam*, 32 *velapuram*, and 64 *kadigaitavalam*. The velapuram enclave, a trading settlement of secondary rank was found also near *Barus* on the west coast of Sumatra Island. The main port at *Barus* was a commercial centre of first rank. This *pattinam*, Barus, as a major camphor-exporting port had international significance.¹³

NAGARA SENAPATI:

In the Telegu language inscription of about 1090 A.D., from Vishakhapatnam on the Andhra coast of south-eastern India, the title *nagara-senapati* appears along with the *padinettu* (18) *bhumi*, as recipient of a grant from a merchant group.¹⁴ The term *nagaram*, in south India, referred to a commercial settlement dominated by

13 Norobu Karashima, "Indian Commercial Activities in Ancient and Medieval Southeast Asia" (Paper delivered at the Conference of the International Association of Tamil Research, 1995), p. 8.

14 Abraham, **Two Medieval Merchant Guilds of South India**, 1988, p. 196

merchants, but also containing artisans.¹⁵ The term *senapati* was derived from Sanskrit and referred to a military commander. It also appears in numerous Southeast Asian inscriptions, mostly in local languages. The name or designation of this commander of the commercial settlement is of particular interest, since it appears to connect him with the *Nattukottai Chettiar* merchant community.¹⁶

MERCHANTS IN MALAYA:

The *Nanadesi* merchants did not fail to avail themselves of the support of the corridors of power. The Indian community that arose after dispersion settled in Malaya, Saba, Sarvak, Brunei, Borneo and Indonesia that includes Java and Sumatra. That was the story unfolding about the Indian Diaspora.

The Malay Peninsula continues to be in debt to south India and Ceylon to this day to thousands of Tamil and Tamil speaking Muslim merchants. The Malaysans themselves have appreciated the value of this contact by recognizing Tamil as a language to be taught at the Malayan

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 84

¹⁶ Ibid. p. 5.

University. The results on the cultural side of these contacts have struck all observers.

There are many similarities between the Mohammedanism of the **Labbaïs** of the Indian shore of the Gulf of *Mannar* and that of Malays. It would be possible to find striking parallels between objects in daily use, and especially in the pattern, with which these objects are adorned among the two races.

It is largely owing to the commercial activities of the **Labbaïs** and their ancestors that the Malays of the mainland were converted from Shamanism to *Agama Islam*. It is a curiously mingled derivation. Several Common Malay words like washer man, kind or sort, marriage pledge, leaf, couple, and so on, have been traced indubitably to Tamil origins and these are some of the results of an unbroken contact throughout the centuries that follow the early period of colonisation.¹⁷

SOUTH INDIAN MERCHANTS IN BURMA:

An ordinary war may be for territory or trade, revenge, or military glory. The greed of income in the shape of ransom is yet another aim of

¹⁷ Gunasegaram, *Early Tamil Cultural Influences in South East Asia*, 1957, p.9

a war. Tamil literature of the first centuries, especially *Silappadikaram* and *Manimekhalai* testify to the great overseas trade. "*Samudra*" is the main term in classical Sanskrit for the ocean. Passenger ships plied regularly between the Ganges, Ceylon and Malaya in the middle of the first millennium A.D. It was this naval supremacy that enabled Indians to colonize some small pockets in South East Asia. Slackers were disdained to perish and the Freshers were trained to flourish. Indian settlers from Gujarat and *Kalinga* colonised Java, for instance, while others set out for Burma or Cambodia. Indian Diaspora is found even now in the land of *Annam* that includes Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia and Siam, the peninsular Thailand.

The earliest colonists to exercise authority over Burma have been South Indians. The city of Prom was also known as *Vanadesi*, the name of the capital of the *Kadambas* in South India. The earliest inscriptions discovered at Prom are in the South Indian *Kadamba* script of the 5th century A.D.¹⁸

In the 5th and 6th centuries, however Burma became the centre of Southern Buddhism. A number of terracotta plaques carrying the effigy

¹⁸ Ibid, p.9

of Buddha were found inscribed in South Indian characters. The contact of South Indian merchants with Burma in the early centuries of the Christian era is attested to by Ptolemy. He had noticed that large ships used to sail from the east coast of South India to Burma.¹⁹

Scott, an authority on Burmese Archaeology and History in his account of the reign of Alaungsithu (1112-1187), observes:

"The presence of a considerable number of South Indian Tamils through the centuries is attested by the well-known Grantha-Tamil inscription of Pagan attesting the existence of a Vishnu temple built there by Nanadesi merchants and a gift to the temple made in the 13th century by a merchant from one of the port towns on the Malabar Coast".²⁰

TOUCHSTONE IN THAILAND:

There is, in fact, a much earlier Tamil-language inscription, that has been found in Southeast Asia. It comprises two words written on a small stone that was apparently used as a goldsmith's touchstone, now held in the museum at Wat Khlong Thom, Krabi, on the west coast of

¹⁹ Ibid, p.9

²⁰ Ibid, p.9

peninsular Thailand, about 120 km. south of **Takuapa**. Khlong Thom was the site of a very early port and manufacturing centre specializing in the production of beads and other jewellery. The short inscription, written in *Brahmi* script of the third or fourth century A.D, reads *perumpatan kal*. It means 'the touch stone of the master goldsmith'. This was the personal property of an individual artisan, rather than an inscription set up for public attention.²¹

STATUE IN JAVA:

It is worth mentioning that Ganesa figures, some bearing inscriptions, were common features of the east Javanese landscape during the thirteenth century, but were rare in Sumatra. The giant stone Bhairava statue that has been taken to be a portrait-statue of the mid-fourteenth century Sumatran ruler Adityavarman was found at Padang Rotjo, upstream from Sungai Langsat on the Batang Hari river, along with other remains of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries.²²

²¹ Norobu Karashima, "**Indian Commercial Activities in Ancient and Medieval Southeast Asia**" (Paper delivered at the Conference of the International Association of Tamil Research, 1995), pp. 3-4.

²² Ibid, pp.3-4

In 1005 A.D. the king of Srivijaya, who was also "lord of Kataha (Kedah)" built in south India a Buddhist vihara, for which the Chola ruler later granted revenues.²³ **Kedarm** is almost certainly a South Indian perversion of the name *Kedah*, a state on the west coast of the Malay Peninsula. Another inscription calls it '**Kidaram**'. The large grant of the twenty-first year of Rajaraja Chola I, A.D. 1005-6, tells us that in that year a village was granted for the support of the Buddhist temple at Negapatanam on the east coast of Tanjore District.²⁴

A decade later, in 1014-15 A.D., the ruler of Srivijaya presented gifts to a Hindu temple in the Chola state.²⁵ In 1018-1019 A.D., the ruler of Srivijaya and Kedah presented gifts of "Chinese gold" and other objects to the same Hindu temple.²⁶ Rajendra had, about 1024-25, quarreled with the Ruler of **Kedah** for some reason and sent over an

expedition which ended with the latter's defeat. Rajendra's list of conquests includes: Srivijaya, Pannai (north Sumatra), Malaiyur (Jambi),

²³ Aiyangar S.K and Sewell R , Historical **Inscriptions of Southern India** (Madras, 1932), pp. 57-58; and **Epigraphia Indica** 22. no. 34.

²⁴ Robert Sewell, **The Historical Inscriptions of Southern India and Outlines of Political History**, 1983,p.65

²⁵ Annual Report on Indian Epigraphy 1956-57: 15. nos.161 and 164.

²⁶ Ibid,no.166.

Mayirudingam , Ilangasogam (Langkasuka), Mappappalam (Lower Burma), Mevilimbangam (Palembang), Valaippanduru , Talaitakkolam (Takuapa), Madamalingam (Tambralinga), Ilamuridesam (Lamri, Aceh), Manakkavaram (Nicobar Islands), Kadaram (Kedah). It is interesting to note that Rajendra's son later claimed on his father's behalf only the conquest of Kadaram (Kedah).²⁷

It has to be presumed that the mention of places captured with the exception of the case of **Kadaram** during the overseas expedition sent to Malaya in about A.D.1024-25 may merely refer to some military occupations by detachments of Tamil troops sent as garrisons in support of trade.²⁸

These inscriptions have also been discussed by R.C. Majumdar.²⁹ These inscriptions give some indication of the past glory. The impression gathered from the documents is that there was a conglomeration of small traders carrying on trade at various levels.

27 Annual Report of South Indian Epigraphy 1912-13: 961, 26.

²⁸ Robert Sewell, *op.cit*, p.65

29 Maumdar, R.C. **Ancient Indian Colonies in the Far East**, volume 2: Suvarnadvipa, Calcutta, 1937.

TAMIL TEXTS IN WEST SUMATRA:

An inscription belonging to the year 1088 A.D. in Tamil characters has been found at **Loboe Toewa** , Baros, in the island of Sumatra. It records a gift to a temple by a body of persons who are called **Ayirathi Ainnurruvar**, probable a military garrison of Chola Tamils stationed there for the protection of Trade.³⁰

There is a temporal gap of almost two centuries between the ninth century peninsular inscription of *Takuapa* and the earliest Tamil-language inscription found in Sumatra. The period of this latter inscription - dated 1010 Saka or 1088 A.D found at the early port site of **Lobo Tuwa**, just to the north of Barus on the west coast of the Sumatra Island falls within the reign of the Chola ruler Kulottunga.

It states that:

"In the Saka year 1010 current, month Masi, we, the Nanadesa-Tisaiyayirattu Ainnurruvar, having met at the velapuram in Varosu (Barus), also called 'the pattinam (commercial town) for the welfare of the merchant body blessed by Siva', decided to

³⁰ Robert Sewell, op.cit, p.89

*grant as follows to 'our sons', the nagara-senapati Nattu-cettiyar, to Patinen-bumi-desi-appar(?), and to the mavettugal (elephant-trainers?): [On each of the] ships' [cargoes?], the ship's captain and crew will pay the fee anju-tundayam in gold, pegged to the price of kasturi (musk), and [then only] may 'step on the cloth spread' (ie. enter the settlement to trade). Thus we, the Five Hundred of the Thousand Directions, known in every direction in all Eighteen Lands, had the stone inscribed and planted. Do not forget charity; charity alone will help you."*³¹

This inscription was first read by E. Hultzsch.³² He summarized its main points, but did not publish a transcription or full translation. His comments formed the basis of studies by K.A. Nilakanta Sastri. Karashima actually provides the first transcript and translation, made by Prof. Y. Subbarayalu of Tamil University. The version of the contents above derives from this reading.

The contents of this inscription are similar to those of a number of inscriptions produced in the Chola heartland of south India. However, it appears that the grant covered only the **velapuram** settlement of the

³¹ Norobu Karashima, **op.cit**, pp. 6-7

³² Madras Epigraphy Report, Government of India, 1892.

south Indian merchants attached to **Barus**. It was under south Indian administration. Barus served a more mixed community of merchants. This port in Sumatra was famous in the Middle East where it was known as *Fansur*. Traders were drawn not only from Sumatra, Java and south India, but also occasionally from the Middle East, via south Indian ports.³³

DECLINE OF NANADESI GUILDS IN SOUTHERN INDIA:

The great trade organizations like **vira valanjiyar** and **Nanadesi** were active from 8th to 17th centuries as determined by the earliest and the latest inscriptions referring to them. Merchant guilds such as **Ainurravar** and **Manigramam** were present in Southern India in the first five centuries from 1000 A.D. Epigraphical sources stand witness to their activities. Taxes were also negotiated through them. There is little evidence to prove that these guilds controlled production. By the late 15th century such organizations have more or less disappeared from the scene.³⁴

³³ Heritage Society- First Ismaili Electronic Library and Database.

³⁴ Sanjay Subrahmanyam, Ed., **Merchants, Markets and the State in Early Modern India**, 1990. p.247

The boom in sea trade involving maritime Southeast Asia began to dissipate after the middle of the thirteenth century. The commercial importance of the sea-ports had already waned in the 14th century. The connection with the overseas ports was restricted to very few ships plying. As the country trade was getting confined to a handful of ports along the coast, the scope of trade to be carried on by the merchants had also decreased.

In fine, **Nanadesi** formed the most celebrated of all the guilds that had a long notable record of achievements. Its importance was felt long before the rise of the Imperial Cholas of the **Vijayala** line. In the epigraphical sources of Mysore, all the details regarding the origin and organization of the guild, the merchandise in which its members carried on trade with countries and the means of transport employed by them are available in abundance. **Nanadesis** went on trading with foreign countries. Compared to others, the members of this guild were men of honour and boundless charity. They spent a good part of their profits from trade on public benefactions without distinction of caste or creed. They contributed for constructing temples. To cite a few, the temple of Narayana Perumal at **Mudikondam** and the temples of **Adaman Kottai**

and **Kambainallur** in Dharmapuri District of Tamil Nadu were built by them. As a result of these activities, the members of Nanadesi were able to command much respect from the people and this they sustained wherever they went.

CHAPTER-VI

AYYAVOLE:

A merchant association had begun to take a definite shape in the eighth or ninth century A.D in the western Deccan, at **Aihole**. It is called **Ayyavole** in Kannada and **Aryapura** in Sanskrit. Primarily, a religious community they had their headquarters at **Aihole** in the Badami taluk of the Bijapur District, 14 miles north east from the Badami railway station. They were known as the **Ayyavole Association** after their place of origin. This group emerged as the most powerful of the merchant associations in course of time. A number of other merchant groups are known to have affiliated themselves with the **Ayyavole**. The most prominent among them were the **Manigramam** and the **Nanadesi**. The **Ayyavole** have occupied a dominant

position in relation to other professional bodies, including major associations of artisans and mercenaries.¹

Meera Abraham has done an exhaustive study on the **Ayyavole** merchants. Against this backdrop of the changes in economy and the mercantile activities, the functioning of this important merchant guild was widely examined by her. The inscriptions which refer to the **Ayyavole** merchant guild spread over a period from eighth century to twelfth century.

Aihole had an *agrahara* to which '*Five hundred svamis*' belonged. In the **Ayyavole** merchant guild inscriptions, the phrase *500 svamis* was used frequently and the numerical description was always the same. The term *Mahajans* was quite often used to describe Brahmins as a group administering and controlling the *agraharas*. The

¹ Indrapala, K "Some Medieval Mercantile Communities of South India and Ceylon", **Journal of Tamil Studies** 2,2 (1970): 25-39;

Aihole Lad Khan Temple inscription clearly refers to the *Five Hundred chaturvedis* of Aryapura. G.R. Kuppaswamy is of the opinion that the Mahajana group of *agaraharas* was purely Brahmins. **Aihole** remained an *agrahara* right from 8th century and it was most likely that the guild *Ayyavole* 500 was founded by a group of Brahmin **Mahajans** from **Aihole**.²

Tamil, Kannada and Telugu speaking areas have many inscriptions relating to the merchant groups. Historians differ on the question of whether there was a central bureau controlling the various merchant groups that appear in different inscriptions spread all over South India. So it is very difficult to conclude that the various merchant groups are to be collectively identified as **Ayyavole**. K.A. Nilalakanta Sastri, while speaking of merchant guilds in Chola times has stated that the **Ainnurruvar** were the most celebrated one among the merchant groups. He believed that they had a long history and were probably established in the Tamil country before the rise of

² Meera Abraham, **Two Medieval Merchant Guilds of South India**, 1988, p.44

the Imperial Cholas. He suggested that they continued to function in the twelfth century but does not trace their history further. According to him they played a part in the overseas trade of their times.³

G.S. Dikshit who has analysed the working of the Kannada **Ayyavole** association more closely than others believes that the association formed small and workable federations extending over a district or two. In effect this means that he does not believe in a mammoth single corporation covering Tamil and Kannada areas.⁴

NAGARATHAR:

The **Ayyavole** merchants had pride and prejudice. **Ayyavole** had links to **Nattukottai Chettiars** who were not supposed to be inferior to other groups of merchants. The word *Nagarathar* possibly refers to the *Nattukottai Chettiars* of modern time since the term *Nagarathar* is now used extensively by this community.

³ Nilalakanta Sastri K.A., **The Cholas**, University of Maras, 1984, pp.595-597.

⁴ Meera Abraham, op.cit., p.74

The thirteenth century inscription in the **Sokkanatha** temple at Piranmalai in Tirupathur Taluk of the former Ramanathapuram District refers to eleven groups of *Nagarathar* by their townships.⁵

The nagarathar of Aruvimanagaram

The nagarathar of Eripadainallur

The nagarathar of Pudutteru

The nagarathar of Kodumbalur

The nagarathar of Maniyambalam in Tirukkottiyur

The nagarathar of Alagapuram

The nagarathar of Sundarapandiyapuram

The nagarathar of Alagaimanagaram

The nagarathar of Mandaligan

The nagarathar of twelve nagarams including Jayangondasolpuram

⁵ Ibid, p.66

The nagarathar of Karuvur, Kannapuram, Pattoli, Talaiyur, Rajarajapuram, Kiranur, and other cities.

The meeting of eleven groups from different places suggests that the commercial operations were extended over a large area. The term *nagarathar* in this inscription have been used to indicate the **Nattukottai Chettiars** as different groups from the traditional homeland of this community attended the assembly.

Burton Stein describes a *nagaram* as a trade settlement, under the control of merchant groups. Kenneth Hall describes the *nagaram* as primarily a commercial district inhabited by merchants and others who earned their living from commercial activities. He also refers to it as an assembly. Nilakanata Sastri describes the *nagaram* as an assembly of merchants. The **nagrathar** were members of the *nagaram* and this again would refer either to their location or to their membership of the

nagaram assembly. The present-day Nattukottai Chettiars refer to themselves as **nagarathar**.⁶

From the inscriptions many instances can be traced to prove that the merchant groups had autonomy in their internal affairs. The resolutions passed by individual groups to regulate their contributions towards welfare schemes are the ample evidences for their status of autonomy. The **nagaram** of the town of **Valaiyur** resolved in A.D.1037 to maintain the lamp in the local temple by a regular payment in future of certain dues laid on their commercial transaction. The buyer and seller each gave *kal-alavu-pattam* of one *nali per kalam* (on grains), and a *kol-kuli* (weighment cess) of one *palam per nirai*, ten betel-nuts for every thousand exchanged, and so on.⁷ Piranmalai inscription names 39 commodities whose merchants levy upon themselves an assessment for the benefit of a temple. It was a 'willing tax on goods' paid by the merchants.⁸ In later days it came to be known as '*magimai*' in Tamil. These merchants had no love for plunder. So

⁶ Ibid, p.84

⁷ ARE 82 of 1906

⁸ ARE 154 of 1903

the *magimai* was the obstinate evidence to the friendly overture of the merchants over the society in general. The Muslim Society in Tamil Nadu inherits the good practice of '*magimai*'. The legacy continues to exist around Mosques.

Nagarathar or **Naattukottai Chettiars** are an ancient and important trading community of Tamil Nadu. They had their valuable contribution in the fields of religion, language and literature, temples, music and allied cultural activities. They are located predominantly in the area called **Chettinadu** or Naattukottai Bhumai, i.e., present day districts of Sivaganga and Pudukottai. The word kottai in their name is explained by them as fort. The Nattukottai chettiyars are always called upon to donate to build the fort. *Ainnurruvaperunteruvu* or **Ainnurruvar** Street at **Enkarikudi** was occupied by the Nagarathar according to an inscription of 13th century at Pillayarpatti in Ramanathapuram District.⁹ In this street business transactions would have taken place and there existed possibilities for warehousing facilities.

⁹ Meera Abraham, **op.cit.**, p.113 ; ARE 150 of 1935-36

The **Nagarathar** took a leading part in the trade and commerce not only within but also outside India especially Burma, Malaysia and other South-East Asian countries.

They had connections with places like Kanchipuram, Kaveripoompattinam, Ilaiyarpatti and Ilayathangudi. Merchant guilds like the "**Nanadesi** and **Thisai Ayirathu Aynutruvar**" were also in the flocks of **Nagarathar**. Various sub-groups like *Illuppakkudi* Nagarathar, *Devokottai* Nagarathar, *Onbathu-koil* Nagarathar were also interacting with one another.

Their benefactions include not only the leading temples like Chidambaram, Rameswaram and Tiruvannamalai but also the numerous smaller temples including those of village gods and goddesses. They made special endowments for creating or maintaining Mutts, feeding houses (*Annachatram*), Gosalas, Patasalas, Chatrams (rest-houses for pilgrims), tanks and ponds in many pilgrim centres.

Their services to education especially those of Raja Sir Annamalai Chettiar, founder of the Annamalai University, Alagappa

Chettiar and Karumuthu Thiagaraja Chettiar are equally impressive. Nagarathars had munificent patronage to the development of Tamil language and music and also to Tamil poets and scholars. Their active participation in the freedom movement, their contributions to the national causes and also to the educational and industrial growth of Tamil Nadu are many.

CHETTI:

We have ample reasons to believe that Andhra merchants moved to the Tamil country. Hindus, Christians and Muslims were carrying activities during the period of Vijayanagar rule. The “Chettis” among the Hindus were the most enterprising entrepreneurs. Thirukkalukkunram inscription refer to *Chettis of kavaraï, Thachavadi chetti, Sekku vaniyar* and *Senai kadaiyar*.¹⁰ Thiruvannamalai

¹⁰ SII, Vol.XXVI, No.65, p.42.

inscription refers to another chetti of *kodicenry vaniyar*.¹¹ *Ilaivaniyars* were the cultivators of betel leaves and sellers. *Ennai vaniyar* (Oil mongers) and *kachavada vaniyar* are mentioned in the inscription.¹² *Beri Chettis*, *Ennai Chettis*, *Nagarettu chettis* and *kasukkar chettis* are some of the traders from chettiar community.¹³

The inscription of 1406 A.D. at Tirukkalukkunram refers to some more commercial communities. They are *Chettis*, *Kaikkolas*, *Kavaraiyal*, *Thachavadi Vaniyar*, *Sekku Vaniyar*, *Senaikadaiyar* and *pala Kasayavargattar*.¹⁴ Caste had no barrier to enter into merchant community. The **chettians** have an independent identity as financiers. Komutti Chetti alias *Arya Vysia* and *Kudirai Chetti* are some of the names in Vogue now. *Janapa Chettiyar* alias *Irupathinalu manai Telugu Chetti*, *Devangu Chetti*, *Ayira Vysiar*, *Vaniya Chetti* and

¹¹ SII, Vol.VII, No.161, p.73.

¹² ARE 294 of 1910.

¹³ Edgar Thurston, **Castes and Tribes of Southern India**, Vol.III, Madras, 1090, p.92

¹⁴ SII, Vol.XXVI, No.65, p.42.

Nagarattu vysiar are some of the merchant groups still living in Tamil Nadu. Among these galaxy of local merchant community of Chettiars, *Komutti* and *Janapa* Chettiars are Telugu speaking people, while Tamil is the mother Tongue of all the Chettiars of Tamil Country.

Telugu speaking **Komutti Chettiars** have two sub divisions in the name and style of **Pachai Komutti** and **Vegada Komutti**. Kanniga parameswari or Vasavi at penugunda in Andhra Pradesh is the deity of the **Komutti Chettiars**.

MOTTUPALLI INSCRIPTION :

Commodities were moved by water or overland on asses and buffaloes. Goods were sold at wholesale or retail. Numerous merchant groups mentioned were probably differentiated by the commodity traded or mode of transport.¹⁵

¹⁵ Burton Stein, '**All the Kings Mana**', Madras, 1984, p.231

A good example of importance and strength of medieval coromandel trade comes from **Mottupalli** Port in the 13th century. **Mottupalli** is some 40 miles south of Krishna Delta (Bapatta Taluk, Guntur District). It received a charter in AD 1244 from the Kakatiya ruler of Krishna Godavari delta areas of Coromandel. By then the town may have already been an important trade centre.¹⁶ The **Mottupalli charter**¹⁷ merits attention because it was long and elaborate. The introductory part of this chart reads..

Glorious Maharaja Ganapatideva has granted the following edict to traders by sea starting for and arriving from all continents, islands, foreign countries, and cities. Formerly, Kings used to take away by force the whole cargo viz. gold, elephants, horses gems etc. carried by ships and vessels which, after they had started from one

¹⁶ Nilakanta Sastri K.A., 'Foreign Trade under the Kakatiyas', Journal of Oriental Research 1934, p.319-320.

¹⁷ Robert Sewell, **The Historical Inscriptions of Southern India**, 1983, p.145 ..

country to another were attacked by storms, wrecked and thrown on shore. But we out of mercy, for the sake of glory and merit are granting everything besides the fixed duty to those who have incurred the great risk of sea voyage with the thought that wealth is more important than even life. The rate of this duty (is) one in thirty on (all) exports and imports. (This is followed by a list of commodities with a schedule of customs.)

The Kondavidu Reddi chief Annavota confirmed in A.D. 1358, the order passed in 1244 A.D. by Kakattiya Ganapati decreeing that foreign ships wrecked on the coast should not be held confiscated to the state, but that they and their cargoes should merely be held liable to pay customs duty.¹⁸

This edict of Ganapatideva was renewed in AD 1358 by the Reddi Kingdom and with some modifications by Vijayanagar ruler Devaraya Udaiyar in AD 1390, successors to Kakatiya rulers. The edict

¹⁸ Ibid, p.194

terms sea travel as '*Mahasahasa*'. Nilakanta Sastri suggests that overseas trade may have been in the hands of foreign merchants. However Marco Polo does not specifically mention that foreign merchants are important in trade in '*Mutfili*', which he visited in 1293.

The **Motupalli** Inscriptions of 13th and 14th centuries provide a good impression of powerful and active Coromandel trade organisations. It was capable of establishing centres congenial to their trade and control. The social and economic context they operated in was not urban but dominantly agrarian. The medieval trade organisations must be seen as social and economic groups of medieval south India.

AYYAVOLE AND MANIGRAMAM:

Ayyavole traders were clustering in Mysore and around the Coromandel Coast whereas the **Manigramam** traders were in the central part of Coromandel Coast and beyond. As itinerant traders, a

number of towns were important for them. The **Ayyavole** were active from the 11th to 14th century.

Manigramam and **Ayyavole** were competitors in the beginning. But Manigramam became subordinate to **Ayyavole** in the mid 13th century. Manigramam went into oblivion by mid 14th century as the modus operandi of Manigramam turned dissimilar to that of **Ayyavole**.

VALANGAI:

The **Ayyavole** organisation was a federation of merchant groups associated with one of the major groupings of castes in medieval south India, the *Valangai* or right hand division of castes.¹⁹ The inference is that a caste organisation like *Valangai* shared interests with the core groups. According to Prof. Noboru Karashima, **Valangai** (meaning

¹⁹ Chandrasekara Sastri, S. 'Economic Conditions under Hoysalas', **The Half-yearly Mysore University Journal**, vol 2, 1928, p.220.

right hand) and **Idangai** (left hand) were made up of lower classes consisting of artisans, merchants and hill-tribe soldiers. The emergence of the **Valangai** and **Idangai** took place during the later part of the Chola rule. During the 13th and 14th centuries, they became more powerful. The two groups co-operated with each other in 1429 A.D in the middle Tamil Nadu against Vijayanagar rulers and landlords belonging to the Brahmin and the Vellala communities. However, from the latter half of the 15th century, no such revolt was recorded. The appearance of many new **jatis**, castes whose members gradually organised themselves into groups such as **Chitrameli-periyanattar** (farmers' organisation), **Valangai-Idangai** and **Ainnurruvar** merchant organisations marked a social change. Most of them were in Chola mandalam, the central part of the state of Tamil Nadu.²⁰

There was a bond between the local merchants and the itinerant merchants. The itinerant merchants were the primary agents in the trade network of **Ayyavole**. The Shikarpur inscription refers to

²⁰ The Hindu, 15th Feb, 2006

Pattanaswami, the town official affiliated to **Ayyavole**. So some of the towns were under the control of the traders and they converted these towns into special trade zones. Chola inscriptions²¹ dealt with **converting** Coromandel settlements into *virapattanas*. Mylapore was one among them. Nanadesis met at Mylapore and converted *Ayyapulal-Kattur* into an *Erivirapattinam*. They in their meeting stipulated that communal contribution need not be paid by the residents of the township and reasonable law and order should prevail. Merchants who were found guilty of malpractice were *ipso facto* to be penalised.²²

The presence of **Ayyavole** traders near port sites was rare as most of the find-spots of the inscriptions relating to **Ayyavole** were far away from the coastal areas. In contrast, many inscriptions from coastal towns like Cochi and Kottayam on the west coast, and Theerthandathanapuram in the east coast refer to *Manigramam* and *Anjuvannam*. Hence the **Ayyavole** was not so great a global player like

²¹ ARE 1912-13, Nos.256 and 342 of 1912, para 25 and 30.

²² Ibid, pp.99-100

Manigramam and *Thisai Airathu Ainnurruvar*. Meera Abraham projected **Ayyavole** as '*numero uno*' among the merchant groups of Medieval South India as she is of the opinion that all other major guilds of merchants were affiliated to **Ayyavole**.

The pronunciation of **Ayyavole** is almost similar to the Tamil word '*Ayyarval*' which stands for Brahmin. The members of the **Ayyavole** group of merchants were predominantly Brahmins. From its inception in Aihole, till about the mid-twelfth century, the **Ayyavole** association in Kannada areas was closely associated with the *agrahara* and *agrahara* Brahmins.²³ Kannada **Ayyavole** settlements or markets were frequently located in *agraharas* and there is frequent evidence of the actual participation of Brahmins in trading ventures.

²³ ARE 519 of 1960-61, Mudnur, Gulbarga District and SII, XV, 65, Konnur, Bijapur District. Cited by Meera Abraham.

Mummuridanda:

Trading organisations like that of **Ayyavole** could not have operated over such a vast area for so long without the ability to combine the numerous constituent trade groups and without some military power. **Mummuridandas** of Knnada areas associated themselves with **Ayyavole** merchants. The *Mummuridanda* means advance guards. They were originally hired by the traders to give protection for the itinerant groups and to ensure the safety of merchant settlements. Later on they themselves engaged in various forms of trading activities as an associate group. They were mentioned in eleventh and twelfth century inscriptions as a subordinate group along with the 500 *swamis* of **Ayyavole**.²⁴ The Mummuridanda in this period were seen collaborating with other merchant groups such as the *ubhaya-nandes*.²⁵ *Eriviras* and *Munaiviras* are mentioned in Tamil language Ainnurruvar inscriptions.²⁶ They were also warriors to

²⁴ EI, V, 3; SII, XV, 106 and SII, IX, pt.1, 139.

²⁵ ARE 173 of 1971-72.

²⁶ ARE 1912-13, p.100 and ARE 342 of 1912-13.

protect the merchant guilds. The word *Eriviras* indicates the fighters capable of throwing daggers at the enemy and the *Munaiviras* are the fighters in the forefront of the army. The dwelling places for the militia employed by the merchant guilds were known as *Erivirapattinam*. **Erivirapattinam** were establishments peculiar only to Tamil areas in eleventh century.

The Tamil inscriptions mentioning **Ainnurruvar**, **Nanadesi** and **Valanjiyar** or right hand division of the army were found in Kannada areas as Gundlupet and the whole of the present day southern Karnataka fell within the Cola administrative division of *Gangaikonda chola vala nadua* and *Mudikonda chola mandalam*.²⁷

The trade between Tamil country and Kannada continued from the medieval period through the later centuries without any hindrance. **Ayyavole** traders operated through three trade routes which existed in the **Kongu** region through the Palghat pass. To

²⁷ Meera Abraham, op.cit., p.57

reach Mysore from Palghat, the route via *Perur-Danaichenkottai* had a pass at *Gajjalhatti*. During the Medieval period, tax was levied for traders on this route. The epigraphic inscriptions of **Danaichenkottai** confirm this fact. Later this pass was repaired by Hyder Ali and Tipu Sultan and the road laid subsequently came to be known as Sultan Road. The bridge at the Gajjalhatti pass is made of lime and mortar inlaid with thin bricks. It is evident that the cannons and the renowned bullocks of Tipu's army would have easily commuted on this bridge. Five kilometers down south near the Gajjalhatti fort, which is in ruins, a dargah is seen on the riverbank. The dargah is known to be the place of burial of five of Tipu's officers one of them being Burhanuddin killed in the third Mysore war in September 1790. This looks like a Sufi shrine and people of any background offer prayers. Tipu would have used this area and the quarters as garrison. The bridge at the pass has not been affected by the floods or by erosion. After the fall of Srirangapatna in May 1799, the Britishers destroyed the **Danaichenkottai**, the vital fort of **Sathyamangalam**, to wreck the

nerve line of provisions to and from Mysore. Yet the bridge has survived the ravages of time.²⁸

The mere occurrence of the number 500 (*ainnuru*) as a prefix to *Svamis* or *Mahajanams* of **Ayyavole** merchant guilds as *ainnuru* svami or *ainnuru* Mahajan is not sufficient to equate the 500 *Svamis* of Kannada with *Ainnurruvar* of Tamil country. The groups who sponsored the founding of the guild in *Aihole* were different from guild in Tamil speaking areas. Since the Brahmins had ritual restrictions in taking food with other class people they would have felt constrained to conduct long distance trade.

The guild of **Ayyavole** occupies a preponderant position in the economic activities of the period. It is noted that the guild finds mention in more than fifty inscriptions spread over seven centuries and practically all over South India. The earliest reference to the guild is available at about the beginning of the eighth century A.D. in a

²⁸ **The Hindu** , Chennai, March 1, 2005.

Canarese inscription in a character as found in **Aihole**, on the front wall of an old temple now called the Temple of Lakhas.

An inscription from Tirumuganpondi mentions the award of a gift by a merchant of **Ayyapoli**. This inscription states that this is not the name of a village but a merchant guild. Another inscription from Coimbatore dated 1397A.D. registers the award of a gift for feeding the members of **Ayyavole** community. The inscription from Kollegal in Coimbatore refers to the merchants of **Ayyavole**.

Inspite of the numerous references and detailed information gleaned from epigraphical sources, it is very difficult to explain precisely in modern terms the character and structure of the guild. The record from Shikapur in Mysore gives a vivid account of these merchants and their status depicting that they were brave men born to wander over many centuries ever since the beginning of Kreta Yuga (age), penetrates regions of the six continents by land and water routes, and in dealing in various articles such as horses, elephants, precious stones, perfumes and drugs, either wholesale or retail. It establishes the

fact that they were great traders of the medieval period. It is confirmed that the importance of **Ayyavole** is realised from the very high sounding titles claimed by them such as 'children of **Ayyavolepura** Parameswariya Makkal, Bagavatiya Makkal etc. As a merchant organisation, **Ayyavole** played a preponderant role in the economic activities of medieval period in South India to such an extent that there had been so many other guilds such as **Valangai** and **Mummuridanadas** who accepted the hegemony of **Ayyavole** and worked under its control.

CHAPTER VII

CONCLUSION

The guilds were small business associations, which existed in different forms from ancient times in India. The association of people of same trade was formed to benefit the trade and the society. The merchant guilds were constituted to protect mutual interest and maintain standards of morality. Guilds, the mercantile bodies were known as **Srenis** during the **Vedic** period. Kautilya in his **Arthashastra** during the 4th century B.C. referred to the functions of the guilds. The maintenance of the Temples and poor feedings were some of the several functions of the guilds. As they were tax-paying institutions, they filled the treasury of the rulers. Localisation of occupation, hereditary character of professions and the ideas of a group leader or *jethaka* were the main factors for the rise of guilds. The guilds are considered to be

the offshoot of the caste groups. Hence the corporate groups are assumed to be the progeny of the caste groups.

Kautilya uses the word **Sreni** to indicate the guilds of workmen, a military class and corporations that subsist by trade, agriculture, milking etc. In Mahabharata **Sreni** means a guild of merchants. Panini defines it as an assembly of persons following a common craft or trade in a commodity. Thus it is taken to be the fundamental characteristic of **Sreni**. It is a corporation of people following the same trade or craft. In other words it means a guild of artisans or traders.

Various undertakings of the guilds helped amass huge fortunes and Kautilya prescribes methods of extracting money from these guilds in times of need by the state. In records of the Mauryan period *sulka* is mentioned as an important source of royal income along with '*bali*' and '*bhaga*'. As early as the

fourth century B.C. the municipal authorities of Pataliputra had to constitute a special board to superintend trade and commerce. Its members had charge of weights and measures.. Thus by the Mauryan period the guilds had developed into fairly large-scale organizations.

The cultivators and mercantile people were divided into a number of *Grihas* (Homesteads) or **Kutumbas** or **Kulas** (families). The head of each of them was called a *Grhapat* or *Kutumbin*. He occupied a position of authority. **Srenis** or craft-guilds were a normal feature of the **Satavahana** period. References are found to guilds of oil pressures, Hydraulic machine artisans, potters, weavers, corn dealers, bamboo-workers, and braziers. The prevalence of these guilds shows that the institutions of self government were common in the country. The *Srenis* were not only craft or trade guilds. They

acted also as Banks. During the Satavahana period foreign trade and commerce flourished.

The system of guilds which originated in a definite structure and form in the early **Buddhist** period, continued through the **Mauryan and Satvahana** period. The merchant guilds of medieval India are nothing but the mirror image of the guilds of Ancient India.

The Arabs came for trade to the peninsular South India and settled in the west and east coastal towns. They maintained their religious identity. Therefore they were given a name by the local people to identify them as a group of people from abroad and they were known by the name **Yavanar** during the seventh century. The word *Yavanar* was in vogue to signify the Greeks and Romans in the **Sangam** age and later it was used to identify the Arab Muslims. Since the progeny of five different groups in Arabia came

here and settled with five times prayer per day, they came to be known as **Anjuvannam** (five colours).

The word **Anjuvannam** repeatedly appears in the inscriptions of Kottayam and Cochi copper plates of 9th Century besides Theerthandathanapuram inscription on stone. **Anjuvannam** occurs in the inscriptions along with other groups of merchants such as **Arunurruvar**, **Manigramam** and **Valanjiyar**.

The verses in Perungathai, a seventh century Tamil literature refer to Yavanar. Palsanthamalai, an eighth century Eulogy in Tamil depicts that the Yavanar prayed to Allah. **Meharaj Malai** illustrates **Anjuvannam** as Muslims. In the light of the discussion made earlier in the third chapter it is concluded that the Muslim identity of Anjuvannam, the guild of merchants in Medieval South India, is beyond any doubt.

Manigramam, a major guild of merchants was coordinating with **Anjuvannam** in all affairs of mercantile and social activities of the Tamil country. The 9th century copper plates of Cochin and kottayam bear witness to them. **Manigramam** extended its mercantile activities across the ocean in the East. The Tamil inscription of **Takuapa** in Siam speaks volumes about their hegemony over the South East Asia. Manigramam by its extended mercantile activities not only built temples but also made impacts over the language and customs of the people of the lands of Burma and Indonesia. The rulers of the Tamil country left indelible impressions in the far off lands. There was a sharp decline in the economic power of **Manigramam** and other guilds like **Nanadesi** within south India during the course of 13th century. Hence most of the Tamil inscriptions abroad in this period did not mention the merchant guilds of south India. From inscriptional evidences collected from abroad it is concluded that **Manigramam** was a guild of Hindu merchants.

Thisai Ayirathu Ainnurruva Nanadesi is translated as 'Traders of 1500 direction spread over many countries' or 'The five hundred of the thousand directions in all countries'. They are one of the branches of the **Ainnurruvar** merchants. They built temples and involved themselves in the internal affairs of its administration. Shikarpur inscription gives a vivid account of the **Ainnurruvar** and their greatness and speaks of a gift to learned Hindus and to the Hindu deities. **Yezh Thisai Ayirathar** mentioned in a stone grinder found near Kanai in Villupuram district is slightly different from **Thisai Ayirathu Ainnurruvar** and it is proved to be a trading group from **Yazhpanam** (Ceylon). A Tamil inscription at **Lobo Tua** in Sumatra mentions that **Thisai Airathu Ainnurruvar** had a meeting at Barus in the Saka year 1010 blessed by Siva. So its religious affinity is proved to be Hindu.

Nanadesi seems to be a general term to include all itinerant traders and it has less number of chances to appear in the inscriptions with an exclusive identity. Since the term **Nanadesi**

occurs as a suffix to **Ainnurruvar** and **Thisai Airathu Ainnurruvar**, it is concluded that the **Nanadesi** as a separate guild of merchants has no entity.

The guild of merchants in the name and style of **Ayyavole** had their origin in Aihole during eighth and ninth century. It was an affiliating guild of merchants as it is found that the other groups like **Manigramam**, **Ainnurruvar**, **Nanadesi** and minor groups such as **Nagarathar**, **Valangai** and **Mummridandas** were associating themselves with **Ayyavole**. Hence it is concluded that the **Ayyavole** was a federation of merchant groups in medieval South India. The members of **Ayyavole** were predominantly Brahmins as they had their settlements only in agraharas and they were also known by the term **500 Svami** (*ainnuru Svami*).

Ainnuru Svami of kannada areas with the numerical prefix of 500 sounds similar to **Ainnurruvar** of Chola country. In the

inscriptions of Chera and Chola period occurs not only the **Ainnurruvar** but also **Arunurruvar** (six hundred men). **Ainnurruvar** and **Ainnuru Svami** of **Ayyavole** had separate entity though they had *Ainnuru*, the numerical number 500 in their name.

Mummuridandas, the advance guards who associated themselves with **Ayyavole** merchants of Kannada; **Eriviras**, the fighters capable of throwing daggers at the enemy and **Munaiviras**, the fighters in forefront of the army to help the **Ainnurruvar** merchants are the illustrative evidence for the existence of the guilds of fighters in the medieval time.

In the last quarter of the first century the merchant world clearly established relation between Tamil Nadu and other neighbouring states. This axis integrated the peninsular India through the central region. An important element was the defence

of the fleets of merchants since the pirates created constant insecurity for the voyagers.

The functions of the guilds of merchants can be defined as service to its members and promotion of their interest. The economic development shows the existence of markets regulated by the guilds. The merchants had to confront manifold problems relating to their commercial activities such as dealing with other merchants and the rulers. Among its obligations was the contribution to the charity affairs and to the exchequer of the rulers.

A merchant group is different in many qualities from those of the other. However in some aspects resemblances have been found. **Ainnrruvar** and **Nanadesi** are similar in many aspects. Altogether merchants maintained solid relations with each other but there were differences too. It was necessary to identify and exclude the roughish elements from the guilds for the protection of the mercantile groups. The Guilds of merchants had to take care of the

situations inspired by envy and desire for excessive profits and so on.

From the frequency and tone of the inscriptions the active period of a particular guild is deduced. The corpus of inscriptions is the main source of information on the merchant guilds. The prasasti or eulogy of a ruler usually indicates the relationship of the merchants with the State. The position of a Guild of merchants in relation to other corporate bodies is also revealed in the eulogy. Some inscriptions are reticent by nature and they are dumb witness. The collateral evidences make such inscriptions to speak the truth behind the writings. Perhaps it also exposed their real nature. The locations, the contents, timing and the contexts of the inscriptions provide an interesting sidelight on an important period in the economic history of the particular region.

Though not happy with the importance enjoyed by the merchants the governments could not dispense with them, due to

perennial problems to run the administration effectively. The merchants advanced their own economic gains and considered themselves indispensable to the administration. So the rulers treated the merchants with disdain.

The whole mechanism of trade functioned within the parameters of a structure controlled by guilds of merchants. Almost all the groups who worked to keep the mechanism of trade in operation possessed a substantial degree of power and influence over the other in the same profession. The members, represented all grievances to their guilds, settled minor disputes and regulated the market according to the copper plate inscriptions discussed earlier in the third chapter. The modern day guilds are nothing but the mirror image of the guilds of medieval India.

The hegemony of the merchant guilds left the field at the fag end of the 14th century. There appears to have been a lengthy hiatus in the writing of inscriptions in coastal regions during 14th

century. The Guilds of Merchants grew and ripened and were mown down by sickle of time. A dynamic tradition never stops. The guilds of merchants left their footprints in the sands of time and transformed into new shapes to move further into the modern period with new nomenclatures.

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